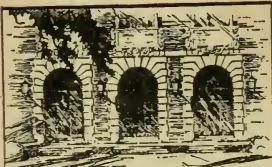


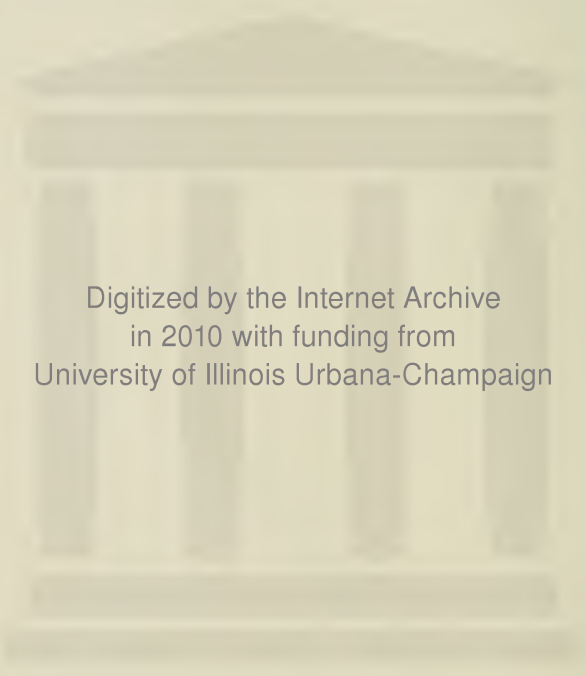
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YOUNG MISTLEY.



‘ We see the winner in the race :
’Tis but of victors poets tell.
Who knows but, in a humbler place,
Runs one who has run just as well ?—
Debarred by some slight accident,
Withheld by freak of cruel fate,
Fighting against discouragement,
And grasping hope that comes too late.
Victory may be dearly won,
Brave he who gained the foremost place :
Yet bravest may, when it is run,
Be he who ran the losing race.’

YOUNG MISTLEY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,
Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen.

1888.

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YOUNG MISTLEY.

CHAPTER I.

MONSIEUR JACOBI—the Baroness de Nantille ?

Monsieur Jacobi bowed with grave courtesy—the Baroness de Nantille inclined her head without raising her eyes, and the introduction was complete. The introducer, Mrs. Wright, turned away with a little sigh of relief to continue her duties of hostess. Monsieur Jacobi and the Baroness had never been to her house before, and the astute little Englishwoman was not prepossessed in favour

of the foreign lady. Monsieur Jacobi, of course, was irreproachable. Everyone knew the name of the new musician whose violin had insinuated him into every circle in London where the fine arts came under unprofitable discussion. Mrs. Wright rather prided herself upon being particularly English, however. She avoided Continental celebrities who, like prophets and other self-made folk, are entirely unknown in their own land. She was, no doubt, terribly prejudiced, after the manner of her countrymen and women ; but the fact remains that Bohemianism, long hair, and sallow faces received a scanty welcome in her drawing-room. Affectation in any form or manner was singularly distasteful to her, and she was not afraid of showing her feelings in this matter.

The most regular frequenters of her cheerful little entertainments were not, as a rule, celebrated in any way. There was a sprinkling of young military men, a carefully

selected assortment of active politicians, and some waifs and strays who followed various crafts and professions. It is to be feared that Mrs. Wright found her friends among a circle of very cheery idlers. Men without lofty aspirations—women without ambition. Maidens who danced, and sang, and loved, and laughed—youths who rowed, and rode, and roamed, and smoked wooden pipes in the streets.

Of such the small rooms were full this evening, and Madame la Baronne de Nantille was hanging heavily upon her hostess's hands. The stalwart youths at that moment dancing in the other room had, by some strange mishap, one and all discovered that their programmes were full when Mrs. Wright proposed to introduce them to the distinguished stranger. Every hostess knows the difficulty attached to allowing their guests to bring friends, and if Mrs. Wright had thought it worth her while she would have borne some

ill-will towards the ladies who had been the means of introducing two such 'unlikely' people as the Baroness and Monsieur Jacobi into her house. But, as was her cheery habit, the little lady took things and guests as they came, making the best of everything. And now a weight was removed from her mind. The sudden inspiration had passed through her brain to introduce these two to each other, and trouble little more about them. Monsieur Jacobi, as already mentioned, was a most presentable person. Clean-shaven, dark and sleek, his manners were suave and courtly ; his medium-sized, graceful figure an ornament to any room. Such minute peculiarities of dress as he indulged in were offensive to none, and most allowable in a musician somewhat above the average. In Kensington he was much run after by damsels who mistook, in themselves, bodily weakness for mental woe, dressing in sombre misshapen garments in order to pass on the

belief to others. But in Mrs. Wright's house Monsieur Jacobi had not as yet succeeded in creating in any fair young bosom the least thrill of interest. The hostess herself, who it is to be feared was somewhat cynical, persisted in looking upon him as a violinist and nothing else. She accorded to him no greater attention—and indeed not so much—as she did to young Sparkle who had just scraped his way into Woolwich Academy and his first dress-coat.

With the Baroness, however, it was a different matter. Mrs. Wright honoured her with a good deal of attention of an unobtrusive order. In fact, she took every opportunity of glancing unobserved in her direction, noting with her quick gray eyes every detail of the Baroness's dress, every tiny movement, many of which betrayed to the woman of the world that this stranger was out of her element.

The introduction took place in the smaller

drawing-room, which was almost deserted at the moment. Indeed, there was only one other person present. This was a man with hair and pointed beard, moustache and overhanging eyebrows as white as snow. The head was that of an old man—such as one pictures the ancient patriarchs to have been—but the body was straight, and the movements, without being lithe, were far from denoting infirmity. This was Laurance Lowe—a mossless stone whose rolling-days were done. People whispered to each other that in days gone by Laurance Lowe would fain have ceased his rolling ways, but that Providence had willed it otherwise, sending a courageous and fairly intelligent young soldier—one Lieutenant Wright—to set the stone once more agoing, and to gather for himself the moss. Whatever may have passed between the white-haired man and the cheery little matron (still comely and hearty) in those forgotten

days was only known to themselves, and neither ever referred to it. People wondered why Mrs. Wright should trouble herself with this silent old man, who contributed in no way to the entertainment of her guests. They considered him an old bore, though he never displayed the least anxiety to be honoured with their attention—never yawned, never confessed to fatigue, and never partook in a general conversation.

It was to him that Mrs. Wright turned with her ready smile, which, however, had something different in it when her eyes met his. She raised her eyebrows and made an almost imperceptible movement with her lips, which plainly said, ‘I do not like those people.’ Lowe gazed at her solemnly beneath his shaggy white eyebrows as she crossed the room, but his face betrayed no sign of having read aright the expression of hers. His eyes never returned the little flash of mutual understanding: the light

from the candles on the delicately tinted wall glimmered on the surface of the small single eyeglass he carried perpetually and without an effort. It was well that his face was thus expressionless and habitually somewhat stony, for Monsieur Jacobi was watching from out of the corners of his eyes.

Laurance Lowe inclined his head with an old-world courtesy, as Mrs. Wright approached him.

‘Coffee?’ he said interrogatively, without moving moustache or beard, and offered her his arm.

‘Thanks, Laurance, I will!’ replied the little lady, with a grateful smile. During the last twenty years these two had gone through that little ceremony many hundreds of times.

They passed together into another room, and the Baroness was left alone with Monsieur Jacobi. He had possessed himself of her engagement-card and was now studying it,

pencil in hand. Every curve of his body the very manner in which he held his pencil, his eagerly bowed head, were expressive of the utmost deference and respect.

The Baroness had not yet raised her eyes from the polished floor. Her strong white hands, beautifully shaped and encased only in open-work mittens, lay idly upon her lap. There was something in her whole attitude, in the repose of her fair face, in her down-cast eyes, which was forced and unnatural. Hers was indeed a beautiful face, sculptured on rather a smaller scale than Englishmen admire, pale and very calm, with red level lips, and close-set eyes. Her soft colourless hair, almost white in its exquisite fairness, was arranged with extreme simplicity, but she wore it parted upon one side, in accordance with a fashion now obsolete in England. She could not have been more than twenty-five years of age, despite her repose of manner, which was almost that of a matron.

When Monsieur Jacobi had made sure that they were alone, the expression of his keen face underwent a remarkable change, though his attitude remained unaltered.

‘Who,’ he asked in a low-pitched voice, and with an unpleasant smile—‘who is the old fossil who wears an eyeglass in one eye and sees with the other?’

The Baroness raised her calm blue eyes, and met Jacobi’s sardonic smile with a contemptuous stare.

‘Your conscience must indeed be an evil one, Jacobi,’ she said slowly. ‘You are for ever suspecting the most innocent and harmless of treachery and double-dealing.’

‘Nevertheless, Baroness, who is that man?’

‘That man, my friend, is one—Laurance Lowe—an English radical, which means nothing. He has, by this time, completely forgotten the existence of both of us. I should imagine that his whole attention and

time are given to the management of his own affairs.

‘ You know him, then ? ’ said Jacobi, seating himself lightly and gracefully near to the Baroness.

‘ By reputation only. ’

‘ You know some one who knows him well ? ’ persisted the violinist calmly.

‘ I do ! ’

‘ Ah ! May I inquire—— ’

The Baroness suddenly cast down her eyes, and the white lids closed over them. A faint pink tinge appeared on either cheek.

‘ I obtained my information from Mr. Charles Mistley, ’ she said in an indifferent voice.

‘ Brother of *the* Mistley ? ’

‘ Brother of *the* Mistley. ’

‘ Who is daily expected in England, with his chief, Colonel Wright ? ’

The Baroness bowed her head in acquiescence. Her red lips were pressed close to-

gether, her colourless eyebrows slightly raised. Monsieur Jacobi prided himself upon his deep discernment in matters connected with the female heart and mind. He therefore changed the subject somewhat abruptly.

‘You did not expect to meet me here to-night,’ he said with exaggerated coolness.

‘No.’ Her voice was totally without expression.

‘I am here on business.’

‘Indeed.’

‘And you?’ inquired Jacobi insolently.

The Baroness looked up with slightly raised eyebrows.

‘That is my affair!’

Jacobi smiled again with a singularly unpleasant curl of the lip.

‘Yes, Baroness,’ he said; ‘I am here on business connected with the Brotherhood, and I call upon you to assist me.’

The Baroness looked somewhat sullen, and remained silent.

‘Miss Lena Wright,’ continued Jacobi, ‘the daughter of our amiable hostess, is, I have reason to believe, likely, and more than likely, to come in for a considerable fortune on the death of . . . Mr. Laurance Lowe, whom I have seen to-night for the first time. She is, I am led to suppose, singularly amiable, somewhat romantic, and with no more strength of mind or purpose than is considered desirable in a young English lady. The Brotherhood, as you know, is desperately in need of funds. You begin to see, fair Baroness !’

‘You wish to enrol her ?’ asked the Baroness in her emotionless manner. ‘You wish to enrol her, and for the sake of her money !’

‘I think,’ replied Jacobi, gazing sadly at the floor, ‘I think it would benefit the cause.’

‘What do you wish me to do ?’ asked she abruptly.

‘Nothing much—to-night !’ was the reply.

‘Tell me what Miss Wright is dressed in, so that I may recognise her. I will manage to get an introduction somehow. That will be enough for to-night.’

‘She is dressed in white,’ replied the Baroness, in the concise manner of one who observes everything and forgets nothing. ‘Tall and slight, with hair a little darker than mine, rather badly dressed and somewhat untidy. I suppose she is considered beautiful!’

‘You do not know her?’

‘No!’

Monsieur Jacobi now became absorbed in the re-arrangement of the delicate flower in his button-hole, and took the opportunity of glancing keenly at his companion’s face, which, however, was motionless and devoid of expression.

Presently the Baroness looked up, and caught his sidelong gaze fixed upon her.

‘I think, Jacobi,’ she said, ‘that you make

a great mistake in attempting to be too diplomatic—too mysterious. There is, in fact, about you too much of the stage conspirator. You may of course, as far as I know, be a member of a thousand secret societies, whose mission it is to reorganize the world and society by means of crime and bloodshed ; but I would have you remember that you are connected with me only as joint members of the Brotherhood of Liberty, which is no secret society at all. With me you need observe no mystery, no precautions. I am not to be impressed, like a weak girl, by your stagey little surprises and deceptions. Why, for instance, you should have allowed, or asked perhaps, Mrs. Wright to introduce you to me to-night—I do not know. No good can possibly come of it, and I distinctly prefer to take no part in such small farces in the future. Your authority over me ceases as soon as our meetings are adjourned. It extends in nowise to my own life ; and

unless we are in meeting, I must beg of you to treat me as a stranger, or at least a distant acquaintance. So long as I pay my subscription and attend such meetings as you may think proper to call, I am free to live how I like and where I like—with whom and amongst such as I may think fit !

The Baroness had been speaking in French with a slight accent such as Germans never overcome in that language. Her voice had not been raised above its calm pitch, and she had never taken the trouble to look into Jacobi's face in order to see the effect of her speech. This was no half-hysterical effort of a weak nature to throw off the influence of a stronger mind ; it was mere calm self-assertion, and Jacobi drew back before it. The Baroness had been daintily arranging the lace at her wrist, and now she crossed her hands upon her lap and gazed quietly at the dancers, whose movements could be

followed through the open door of the inner room.

Jacobi smiled his saddest, most deprecating smile, and replied :

‘ I am sorry, Madame la Baronne, that you should take exception to my conduct ; but to-night, as in most cases, I had important reasons for doing as I did. As you observed just now, I am a bit of a politician, and, I trust—a patriot. Those, madame, who are suspected cannot be too suspicious !’

With these words Monsieur Jacobi rose, and gracefully tendered the assistance of his arm to the Baroness, who accepted it.

‘ I have taken the liberty of placing my name against the dance about to commence,’ said he. ‘ It is a waltz. Shall we go into the other room ?’



CHAPTER II.

WHEN Mrs. Wright and Laurance Lowe left the smaller drawing-room, they turned their steps towards a diminutive apartment, where some late arrivals were yet partaking of tea and coffee. For some moments neither spoke. Laurance Lowe was a singularly silent man, and Mrs. Wright was by no means an excessive talker. They understood each other thoroughly, and both enjoyed these long spells of silence. Lowe found a seat for Mrs. Wright in the dimly lighted corridor, just outside the small coffee-room, and left her there while he went in quest of the

coffee. Presently he returned and sat down beside her.

‘Dark horse!’ he murmured within the white recesses of his moustache and beard.

Mrs. Wright was fanning herself gently, for it was June, and she closed her fan slowly as she looked up and met his solemn eyes.

‘I think they form a good pair,’ she said, smiling a little. She had rightly divined that her companion was referring to Monsieur Jacobi.

Lowe reflected deeply for a minute.

‘No,’ he said at length with senile deliberation. ‘No; I think the girl is all right, but I do not like the man. He reminds me of a dentist I once had cause to visit, and I hate dentists.’

At this moment the servant appeared with the coffee. Lowe selected the fuller cup, and handed it to Mrs. Wright. He dropped one piece of sugar nimbly into it

without causing a drop to splash up, and then he began a deliberate search for a second piece of smaller dimensions. He knew to a drachm how much sugar Mrs. Wright liked. There was no lump of the desired size, so he broke a piece in his gloved fingers, and daintily holding one half in the sugar-tongs, he proceeded to scrape with the other half the particular angle that had come into contact with his glove. The tray in the servant's hand shook in a suspicious manner, but his face was perfectly stolid. Mrs. Wright smiled a little pathetically, but made no attempt to intimate to her companion that his labours were unnecessary. At length the task was complete, and the servant was allowed to turn his face away and grin his fill.

‘Lena,’ said Lowe pensively as he stirred his coffee, ‘is looking lovely to-night.’

Through the curtained doors the cadence of a slow soft waltz reached their ears, rising

and falling on the heavy atmosphere. Mrs. Wright was anxious this evening, and a little restless. She had that morning received a telegram from her husband, announcing his arrival at Brindisi on the homeward voyage from India, and she had not seen him for two anxious weary years. She sipped her coffee, and glanced over her cup towards Laurance Lowe. His great eyebrows were drawn forward, so that his eyes were in impenetrable shadow. He looked very old and somewhat worn, but he had looked so for many years.

‘Yes, Laurance,’ said she softly; ‘I am a little proud of my daughter.’

He made no reply, but continued to stir his coffee absently. Presently he moved slightly and looked up, drawing in a deep breath.

‘Thursday morning?’ he said in a slightly interrogative tone. This was the time mentioned by Colonel Wright in his telegram

for the arrival of himself and Winyard Mistley at Victoria Station.

‘Yes, Thursday morning at half-past seven. Will you come with us to meet him?’

Lowe shook his head slowly and with much deliberation.

‘Better not,’ he said gravely. ‘Would only be in the way. ‘You and Mrs. Mistley go alone; that will be best.

‘Well then, come in to breakfast at nine o’clock,’ urged Mrs. Wright.

Again Lowe shook his head, his white thin beard waving from side to side.

‘Thanks,’ he said. ‘I will look in during the morning.’

Mrs. Wright paused a moment as if choosing her words to say something difficult.

‘Willy,’ she said at length—‘Willy will want to thank you . . . for . . . for everything; for your kindness to us during his absence. It has been a great comfort to him, I know, to feel that you were always near to us, and

... and it has been a great comfort to us, Laurance, to have you. I do not exactly know what we should have done, Lena and I, without you.'

The little lady actually blushed. It was rather difficult for her to thank this impassive man. The thought of gratitude stirred up smouldering memories, best left to smoulder in the depths of her womanly heart. It made the practical woman of the world look back over the perspective of full years to the days of heedless girlhood. Perhaps it made her recognise the great change that had come over her own being since those days, and compare it reproachfully with the steadfastness of the man at her side.

She had more to say—much more, and she was going on to say it; but Lowe stopped her.

'No thanks,' he said, 'are wanted. I have done nothing but "stand by," as Charlie would say, to be there when wanted.'

‘Yes,’ said Mrs. Wright ; ‘but “standing by” is sometimes weary work.’

Laurance Lowe glanced sharply at her. His light-blue eyes suddenly acquired an unwonted brilliancy. It almost seemed as if Mrs. Wright’s remark might have had a second meaning ; but nothing was farther from her thoughts. If any man could know the undeniable truth of the assertion just made, that man was Laurance Lowe. He had ‘stood by’ all his life.

Instantly his eyes became dull and vague again. It was merely a passing flash of life upon marble features.

‘He will find Lena changed,’ said Lowe, knowing that he was broaching a pleasing subject.

‘Yes, he will find her grown. She is a young lady now, and quite—quite——’

‘Quite able to take care of herself,’ suggested Lowe. Mrs. Wright turned, and their eyes met. Lowe’s were grave ; but

there was about the lines of his face a faint suggestion of a smile. That was the best he could do in the way of smiles, by reason of the long white moustache that hid his lips.

‘Yes, I hope so,’ said Mrs. Wright seriously. She knew that her daughter was fair, and also that it is the fairest who find the saddest lives here. She knew the thousand temptations that beset the path of a beautiful woman, the thousand little slips so easily made, the thousand hands ever ready to push the stumbler down the hill. But her faith in Lena was very great. There was no tangible, no possible cause for fear; but with all her worldliness, all her merriment, and all her apparent carelessness, Mrs. Wright was a true mother; that is to say, she was weak with all the sublime weakness of her kind. It was merely a natural misgiving that came over her at the thought that her daughter’s life was now an individual thing—a separate and distinct vessel floating upon

the great waters, and truly obedient to only one tiller—the tiller of her own heart.

Lena had her mother, her father, and Laurance Lowe to watch over her, to guard and keep her, to fend off the blows that fall upon us all, rich and poor; but Mrs. Wright—weak woman—was pleased to believe that father, mother, and friend are alike powerless to shield their darling from certain small arrows with an exceedingly sharp sting and a bitter barb—arrows which fly about at random, sometimes with the speed of forked lightning, sometimes slowly and very surely, sometimes glancing off and leaving but a scratch, sometimes burying their barbed heads so deep that to extricate them would mean death. But the shooting is never good, never reliable, and never sportsmanlike.

While these two old travellers were worrying themselves over the roughness of the road they had long since left behind, the object of their solicitous thoughts made her

appearance at the end of the corridor—a dainty vision of soft white muslin, with a broad yellow sash round a slender waist. Lena was attended by a huge cavalier of peaceful but distinguished appearance. As she came lightly along the corridor, she was busily engaged in putting back over her ears sundry little stray wisps and tendrils of hair. These particular little curls were almost golden, while above them the heavier coils darkened into living brown. She was smiling and breathless, and just a little flushed. Lena's eyes were in striking contrast to her hair and fair complexion, for they were hazel—a dark, deep hazel—full of ready laughter, capable of sparkling with unbounded mischief; but in repose they were as demure and illegible as those of a nun. At the present moment they were soft and glistening with excitement and weariness: dangerous eyes for a man to look into, especially amidst the surroundings of odorous flowers,

within the sound of slow dance-music, for the next waltz had begun.

The big man, upon whose arm she was leaning, was fanning her with great sweeping strokes, so that the lace upon her dress fluttered in the breeze.

‘Oh, Charlie,’ she was saying, ‘that *was* lovely! I do not think that I ever danced like that before. The music seemed to stop suddenly, to die away into nothing, and then we came to earth. Why was it so lovely—why was it so lovely?’

The big man continued fanning. He looked down at her with a slow, grave smile, such as one expects to see on a Saxon face.

‘And why,’ he said, ‘did we come down to earth again?’

They had both seen Mrs. Wright and Laurance Lowe, and they both knew that they were within ear-shot; but that appeared in no way to interfere with or restrain their conversation. They advanced slowly along

the corridor, Charles Mistley taking one stride to every two of Lena's.

Occasionally the young man glanced down at his companion as young men do glance at maidens. Although Lena was tall and straight as some young tree, the coils of sweet brown hair came no farther up than his shoulder. A very observant person would have noticed two singularities about this young man. First, he was clean-shaven; and secondly, he walked with peculiar firmness, as if there were some power of holding to the floor in the soles of his boots. These, added to the manner of carrying his hands half-closed (as if there should have been a rope within them), and his very brown face, demonstrated satisfactorily that Charles Mistley was a sailor. In the good old times, he would have been a worthy lieutenant to some hardy old sea-dog, all fight and energy—a true sailor and a brave fighter—but Providence had been pleased to place his lot in

later times, so Charles Mistley took things as he found them, and was a very good sailor as they make them now; that is to say, half-sailor and half-engineer. He was not considered to be brilliant, like his young brother Winyard; but his reputation for cool, reliable pluck was firmly established, and his shipmates loved him one and all.

As the two young people advanced, Laurance Lowe slowly raised his head, and his emotionless eyes met Mrs. Wright's, fixed upon his face. They looked at each other, thus, for some seconds, and then turned aside without a word. Lowe's wrinkled hand, burnt brown by many a scorching wind, shook a little, so that the spoon rattled in the saucer. The expression in that elderly lady's eyes resembled so remarkably that which he had discovered in those of a lovely and happy girl, twenty years ago, when she had told him gently and wistfully that his life must henceforth be hopeless, aimless, and object-

less, that he could not meet them, though his own were illegible in the deep shadow of his brows. It was, perhaps, no coincidence that when Lena and her partner approached, the two older folks looked up, not at her, but at Charles Mistley. Something, some vague and doubting wonder, must have prompted Mrs. Wright to do this, for every mother looks ten times at her own daughter in a ballroom for every once that her eyes rest on some other person's offspring. They can no more help it than an artist can resist the magnetic attraction which draws him to the contemplation of his own picture in a gallery full of superior works. But this good lady looked at Charles Mistley, her eyes resting on his strong clean-cut face with a wistful, questioning expression which seemed almost to savour of foreboding. Laurance Lowe gazed at the young fellow with those keen blue eyes of his, and his face bore absolutely no expression whatever. It was

merely the calm impassive contemplation of an indifferent looker-on.

The young sailor looked down upon them from his exceptional height and smiled quietly. Charlie Mistley's smile was a pleasant one to meet. It seemed, somehow, to bring him down to a lower level; and smaller, plainer men felt less inferior. It was a ready smile, too, and women liked it for its sincerity.

'I have,' he said, 'danced Lena into a state of sentimentality. She requires bringing down to an everyday level, so I brought her to her mother.'

'Mother,' said Lena breathlessly, 'being an everyday level?'

Mistley laughed, but made no reply. He seldom indulged in the dangerous game of repartee, which is like boxing, 'just to get warm,' inasmuch as a blow may be dealt with unintentional force in the heat of strife.

‘Look at him!’ continued the girl gaily.
‘He is as cool as—as——’

‘His native element,’ suggested Lowe, without looking up.

‘Yes, thank you. As cool as his native element, and I am perfectly breathless! But it was lovely, was it not, Charlie?’

‘Yes—lovely,’ he said, looking gravely at her. Then he brought forward a low chair.

‘Sit down,’ he said, ‘and I will get you an ice.’

‘I will sit down,’ she replied, ‘but I do not want an ice, thank you. You are so terribly practical and earthly—*n’est-ce pas*, mother?’

‘He is very useful, at all events,’ said Mrs. Wright, favouring Mistley with a smile. ‘I am very grateful to you, Charlie,’ she continued, ‘for dancing with that Baroness de Something. I have had great difficulty in finding partners for her; the young men now—

adays are so hard to please, and I find a growing tendency among them to divide the programme among four or five partners at the most.'

Charles Mistley smiled. That smile of his came in frequently, very profitably, in place of words.

'Yes,' said Lena musingly, with all the wisdom of her first season, 'I am afraid that is a characteristic of the rising generation.'

And she looked demurely and innocently up at Mistley, whose initials appeared five times upon her engagement-card.

He, however, did not appear to notice her glance; he was looking at his programme.

'Yes,' he said presently, 'I have two with the Baroness; I should not be surprised if she dances beautifully. There is something about the way she holds herself which leads one to think so.'

'I suppose she is very lovely,' said Lena, smoothing her gloves.

‘Yes, she is a beautiful woman,’ replied her mother indifferently.

‘Who is she?’ asked Mistley quietly. It was an innocent little question, innocently asked, but it received no reply. Mrs. Wright shrugged her shoulders and sipped her coffee. Laurance Lowe slowly raised his head, and his solemn blue eyes rested inquiringly upon the young sailor’s face. Lena continued to smooth her gloves. The question obviously possessed no interest for any of them except Mistley, and his was only the passing thought of a young man upon the possible history of a beautiful woman.





CHAPTER III.

‘ **B**Y George, Mistle, this is splendid ! Listen to this from the Cologne paper :

“ We learn from our London Correspondent that the Mayor of Dover, in his robes of office, awaited, yesterday, the arrival of the Calais boat, despite the heavy rain to which he was fully exposed on the pier, for the purpose of an address to Colonel Wright and his able young coadjutor Mr. Winyard Mistle, to deliver ” (the translation here is somewhat literal). “ On the arrival of the boat, it was, however, discovered that Colonel Wright and Mr. Mistle were not on board. They parted from the other Indian passengers at Brindisi, and no one appears to have learnt by what route they

purposed returning to England. It will be remembered that these gentlemen have been engaged upon an arduous diplomatic service on the Indian frontier, and their daring firmness and resolute defence of the acknowledged rights of their country in the midst of treacherous friends and unscrupulous foes"—*et cetera, et cetera—et cetera!*

The speaker, or reader, was a tall gray-haired man of military aspect. His moustache was almost white, and cut rather close to his lip. His features showed signs of having once been fine, but wrinkles and hardship had changed all that. His nose was long and aquiline, a true military feature, but it was peculiarly thin; and the skin, though brown, was transparent and entirely free from that suggestive ruddiness which is somewhat frequently found upon the features of elderly military men. He laid aside the German newspaper, and looked at his companion with a twinkle of amusement in his gray eyes.

‘No, no,’ said the younger man gaily. ‘Go on—let us have it all—I like it ;’ and he returned gravely to the discussion of a piece of chocolate.

‘“And unscrupulous foes,”’ continued Colonel Wright, reading from the paper as it lay—‘“and unscrupulous foes”—oh yes; here it is—“undoubtedly saved the Indian Empire endless trouble and strife upon the frontier, while a graver mishap has perhaps been averted, and the peace of Europe preserved, by the prompt and consistent action of these two soldier-statesmen.”’

Winyard Mistley wagged his head very sapiently, and, addressing himself to the piece of chocolate in his hand, he observed :

‘Oh yes ! Rather disappointing for the Mayor of Dover, eh, Colonel ?’

‘Rather,’ replied the old soldier, folding the newspaper.

‘You will be pleased to remember that this brilliant idea of dodging the Mayor of

Dover and the rest of his kind emanated from my fertile brain.'

This remark called for no reply, and for some time the two men were silent. They were seated opposite to each other in a first-class railway-carriage, an airy broad compartment lined with brown linen. A fine dust floated in the air and lay on every available space, for the train was rushing over the bare plains of the Netherlands. All around lay vast tracts of yellow sand, varied here and there by glassy sheets of motionless water. In these pools stood, here and there, a long-legged solemn heron. On a raised embankment the train ran smoothly through the deserted land. The sun had long since set and a faint blue haze was stealing inland across the sand from the distant sea. Winyard Mistley lay back in his corner, and gazed out of the dust-covered window over the monotonous plains. It was a peaceful, dreary outlook; one calculated to call up

sweet memories of the past, to make one dream vague day-dreams fraught with impossibility. The faint light of dying day in the western sky lay over the native land of these two men, the land to which they were returning after two years of arduous work, of constant danger grown wearisome from very monotony. That pearly light spoke to them of home, of rest, and love ; all three rendered marvellously precious by absence in the past years. To the younger man this home-coming must have been doubly moving. Four years before, he had left England an insignificant young soldier with no great prospects, encouraged and sustained by no great influence at headquarters. Now he was about to set foot on England's shores again, a man with a name among her greater sons, with a definite object and aim in life, and that aim the greatest of all that man craves for, the glorification of his own country.

It is assuredly no great wonder that Winyard Mistley should be silent under these circumstances. The very movement of the train in its smooth rapidity, the bewitching hour, the happy days in store—all could not fail to appeal to a youthful heart and a young imagination. But in the man's eyes there was no far-away look, no dreamy wistfulness. Ah ! would I were a lady-novelist ! How infinitely romantic, how yearningly interesting could this youth be rendered ! This duller pen, however, has a humble pride in truthfulness.

Winyard Mistley was an eminently practical young man. He was an adept at mending his own clothes, cooking his own dinner, and grooming his own horse. Practical people, however, are not necessarily devoid of sentiment. They hide it—that is all. What dreaming they may indulge in is done in private.

His was a striking face whether in ani-

mation or repose, with dark gray eyes of singular penetration; eyes that seldom smiled, despite the readiness of the lips which smiled perhaps too easily. A great charm about him was his peculiar unaffectedness. Whatever he did, or said, was to all appearance perfectly spontaneous, and without after-thought. Never at a loss in the most trying emergency, no one ever saw a look of embarrassment or self-consciousness on Winyard Mistley's face. He was simply without vanity, and therefore was fortunate enough to be unafflicted by jealousy.

At this moment his face wore an expression of calm reflectiveness. He was thinking, but not deeply. Perhaps he never had thought very deeply over anything. His thoughtfulness was characterized by an extraordinary readiness. It was not deep, but it was very quick, and therefore likely to make its mark in this shallow age. Such mental work as this never shows itself upon

a man's face, and Winyard Mistley looked younger than he was, despite a few lines about his mouth which were the result of physical hardship, and therefore in no way permanent.

Coming from a military stock, Mistley had himself been in the army ; but the authorities having been pleased to place difficulties in the way of his accepting Colonel Wright's pressing offer to accompany him on a difficult frontier mission, he had calmly laid aside his sword to take up the sharp pen of a diplomatist.

This, though rapidly carried out, had been no hasty conclusion. The young fellow knew that the Indian army was no field for an active-minded man endowed with more than his due share of brains and ambition, such as, without the least conceit, he suspected himself to be.

Such was Winyard Mistley : a man who at the age of twenty-eight had been not only

fortunate enough to find his speciality, but had gone so far as to get his feet well planted upon the rungs of his own particular ladder. It is true that his name was always coupled with that of Colonel Wright, and invariably came second in such mention ; but there were whispers in more than one diplomatic circle that in this happy partnership, one gave the larger experience and more patient attention to details, while the other supplied the brilliant conception and rapid execution.

Colonel Wright was a diplomatist in one great and important matter, if in nothing else. He could, with unflinching discrimination, gather round him the men he required. At a glance he recognised the fighting-man, a mere thoughtless creature of courage, whose ambition lay in the two letters ‘ V.C. ;’ whose soft heart was the most vulnerable portion of his anatomy, his head been the least so when hard knocks were flying. The thinker, also, could the Colonel select from the

crowded ranks of human workers. He had no need for, and took but small interest in, the slow and deliberate thinker of such material as produces essay-writers and specialists ; but he knew full well the value of a brilliant and rapid man whose thoughts are almost instinctive. One who, as a plot unfolds itself before him, can at once, and with light touch, lay his finger upon the motive and say, ‘ This is what he is leading up to ’— ‘ That is what he will do next ; ’ and who, like a skilful chess-player, can execute a counter-move of apparently trifling importance, which, when the crisis comes, carries everything before it.

Of this latter type was Winyard Mistley, and the Colonel was fully aware that the best step he ever took in his life was to persuade that young officer, then fretting under the command of a man somewhat his inferior in many ways, to leave the army and join him, since he could not retain his commis-

sion and accept the offer. Two years of constant intercourse, of days spent in the performance of a common task, and nights passed together in various degrees of discomfort often amounting to danger, will do much to obliterate the barrier that invariably stands between men belonging to a different generation. It had been so with Colonel Wright and Winyard Mistley. The friendship commenced at a mess-table, and based upon letters from the wife of one and the mother of the other, had grown into something stronger ; and gradually the two men (though thirty years lay like a wall between them) had become necessary to each other. Of course there were mutual debts. Had it not been owing to Colonel Wright that Mistley had found his mission in life ? But for him the young officer might still have been idling his life away in semi-indifference. On the other hand, without his brilliant assistant Colonel Wright would un-

doubtedly have failed to carry out the difficult mission entrusted to him. Without this aid he would not now have been returning in triumph to his home, and certainly the honour which they were both so anxious to avoid—that which had awaited them on the pier at Dover—would not have been tendered by the self-constituted representative of a spasmodically grateful country.

It was assuredly something more than mere chance that had brought these two men together, so perfectly suited were they to each other. What the Colonel lacked Mistley supplied, and such slower qualities as were wanting in the younger man were to be found in his chief. Many good qualities, however, had these men in common, qualities necessary to the traveller and sailor, such as independence, readiness of resource, rapidity of execution. They were travelling with very little luggage, and no encumbrances whatever. Each clad in a simple tweed suit,

they might have been beginning some trivial local journey, instead of being at the end of a rush across half the world.

Two small black boxes, lost in a chaos of huge trunks somewhere in the van, were all they could claim, and there was something characteristic even in these small receptacles. Identical in form, size, and colour, they appeared to cling, as if from long habitude, to each other. The same labels and enticing hotel placards were to be found on both; and in particular there was around each a slight indented mark as if from chafe or friction, such as one sees round a river-side post. This betrayed the hardships they had passed through, one on each side of a weary pack-horse, balancing and supporting each other, lashed together, though separated by the body of their bearer. Many of us, methinks, go through our travels like these road-worn trunks, with a mark of friction upon us, showing what we have come

through. A grocer, for instance, though he be clad in purple and fine linen, seems to me to have a slight indentation round the centre of his person, where the apron-string was wont to press. It is his mark, his trade-mark as it were, worn and chafed into his soul as into his body.

Winyard Mistley lay back in his corner, serenely unconscious of his senior's steady gaze. Colonel Wright was absently looking at him, merely because, perhaps, that clear-cut intelligent face was the most interesting object in sight. At length he spoke with the determined air of one who has weighed his words carefully, having something rather difficult to say.

‘In twenty-four hours,’ he said in a speculative tone, ‘our official relationship ceases.’

‘Alas!’ observed Mistley with ready cheerfulness.

‘I do not wish you, Mistley,’ continued the Colonel gravely, ‘to go away without

knowing how fully I appreciate and have appreciated all your unfailing patience, your skill, and your happy power of being ever cheerful and good-humoured under the most trying circumstances. As for my own personal feelings in the matter, I have never ceased to congratulate myself upon my action two years ago in asking you to join me, and I only hope that you will never have cause to regret it.'

'For me,' replied Mistley, looking out of the window, and purposely avoiding the Colonel's eyes, 'these two years have simply been a holiday. That soldiering in India was not the work for me at all—there is too much unavoidable routine—too little to do, and too much time to do it in. Besides, there is always the feeling that the first fool who comes along with his head full of theory could do the work as well, if not better, than one's self. There is absolutely no individuality in the army. We are like so

many brass buttons on a tunic ; if two come off they can be put back in reversed order, or two new ones can be sewn on, and no one is the wiser—the tunic is neither better nor worse. Thanks to you, I am no longer a button. Thanks to you, I have got my foot on the ladder which to me has been the only one worth climbing since I was old enough to know that my life was my own. The gratitude should be on my side, I think, Colonel.'

This was unsatisfactory, and in no manner helped Colonel Wright in his little speech. So the old gentleman went straight to the point at once, and somewhat surprised his junior by the unexpected powers of observation which his remarks betrayed.

'I think,' he said, 'that it is of no use mincing matters between us, Mistley. We know each other too well for that. You have got beyond the lower rungs of the ladder, for you are half-way up it already ;

and in climbing you have found time to give a helping push to an old slow-coach above you, who bid fair to stick where he was. I am not blind, nor am I ashamed to acknowledge that you are a sharper fellow than I. You are my superior in the work we have had to do together, and there is no reason why it should be concealed. The difference lies in the fact that you were born to it, and I had it forced upon me by circumstances. Everything in you points to what Providence designed you for ; with me rests only the honour of finding out the intention of Providence. Your gift of languages points to it, your restless love of travel, your very face even. Why, look at me—I say something very diplomatic, and the best I can do in the way of disguising my feelings is to look blank and vacant ; whereas you can think one thing and make your face express the very opposite !

Mistley was intensely relieved at this

moment to catch sight of the distant spires of Flushing, which enabled him to change the subject. Like many of his countrymen, he could not bear being thanked.





CHAPTER IV.

VICTORIA STATION is not a favourite resort of the fashionable world between the hours of seven and eight in the morning. In fact, that sweetest, freshest, most entrancing hour is rather apt, in London, to be dull and somewhat dismal ; therefore better spent in bed. The early porters were busy sweeping up with long brushes the dust shaken from the feet of many a weary traveller, and sprinkling water in strange circular patterns upon the pavement of the station, when the first hansom-cab of the day made its appearance with much clatter of hoofs.

From it there alighted a brisk little lady, who instantly glanced up at the clock. Her movements were very quick without being in the least fussy. She paid the cabman with an air of quiet confidence, which did not fail to impress upon that most uncivil of public servants (which is saying much) that she was perfectly aware of the fact that he was receiving sixpence more than his legal fare. Then she turned to a porter, and said in a silvery voice, with the faintest suspicion of a foreign accent :

‘The Queenborough train, porter. Which platform, please ?’

‘The far platform, ma’am. Due in ten minutes,’ was the reply, given with a politeness which seemed always to be this little lady’s due. With a quick nod of thanks, she went in the direction indicated. A light, almost girlish form with a firm elastic step, such as is of more service to a girl in a ball-room than the most enticing beauty. Many

a man in passing that girlish form in the street had turned his head, to be met by a pair of calm gray eyes, and to see with a shock of surprise that the pretty energetic face was surmounted by a mass of silvery hair. Mrs. Mistley's white hair was an inherited peculiarity. Long, thick, and silky, it was gray at the temples when she married Major Mistley. It did not change much for two years after that, but at the end of the third year when she returned from India, a widow of twenty-two, it was white. She wore it piled up high upon her graceful head, after a fashion which vaguely suggested Madame de Lamballe, or some other gracious lady of the old French Court. This mode of coiffure harmonized with the faint accent which was hardly that of a foreigner, but rather of one who had for many years spoken in an acquired tongue. Such, indeed, was the case with Mrs. Mistley, who had spent the greater portion of her life in France. For

her, this was the land of the blessed, the home of sunshine and flowers, of sweet and calm country life. It was not the country known to the majority of us—the France of Paris, of broad pavements and lofty buildings, of outward brilliancy and gaudy vice, of dust and reckless merry lives. Her France was a land of smiling meadows and quaint, crumbling family palaces, far from the restless city; where loyalty is still to be found among a quiet self-contained people, living out their lives of voluntary exile from the haunts of man, with a strange restful patience. A race bearing names dangerously historical, and carrying their heads above the petty strifes of Republican office-seekers with a dignified pride intensely galling to the people. They talked sometimes, though rarely, of these same people, and always with a smile, half pitying and half contemptuous, as one speaks of a wayward headstrong child.

Mrs. Mistley walked as far as the plat-

form, and finding no one there, returned to the entrance of the station. Presently a small victoria arrived, and from it Mrs. Wright alighted. The two ladies kissed each other warmly, and both remembered later that that form of salutation had not passed between them since the caressingly affectionate days of their girlhood. Mrs. Wright was somewhat pale, but she returned her friend's smile bravely, and they turned towards the platform indicated by the porter. The train was late, and the two ladies walked up and down the deserted platform in silent impatience. The circumstances of their meeting that morning seemed to have swept away the barrier of years. A coincidence of memory took their thoughts back to the days when they had walked side by side beneath the great silent trees of a vast French forest—a pair of thoughtfully happy girls, and the necessity of speech was no more.

They were now essentially women of the world, well dressed and brisk ; hurrying through life, and gathering much enjoyment from it ; practical, cheerful, and universally liked. They had met again in a whirl of London gaiety, after having lost sight of each other for almost twenty years ; and each having come through the whirring mill of Youth, with its loves and fears, trials and delirious joys, found the other, as in the olden days, a very counterpart of herself. The two young girls whose friendship had found birth under the trees of Melun, as they walked side by side beneath the gently watchful eyes of the nuns who educated them, had each left upon the character of the other her individual influence which had never died away. And so it came about that these two women of the world, walking side by side upon the deserted platform of a London railway-station, found again in the other that little germ of human love

which we call sympathy, and wondered over it, each in her own mind, as we *do* wonder over human kindness when we meet with it. They hardly spoke at all, but each little movement, each word, and the manner of saying it, recalled those bygone days. It was like the recollection—note by note—of some forgotten air : new yet subtly familiar.

Presently they sat down upon a highly polished seat ; and, hidden in the folds of their dresses, their hands met and clasped each other.

‘Do you remember,’ said Mrs. Mistley, with a pathetic little smile, ‘all the nonsense we talked in the old Melun days ? How we were never going to cease corresponding ; how, if we married, we were to be constant companions ; how our children were to grow up together as brothers and sisters ; how . . . our husbands were to be friends.’

‘I am afraid,’ replied Mrs. Wright, ‘that

we were very foolish and romantic in those days !

The brisk little lady stopped short. She was at a loss for something to say—a very rare occurrence. Mrs. Mistley had touched upon a page of her life which was closed to her friend. Those three years of married life were as a sacred memory, and Mrs. Wright thought that the pages were better left unread.

‘Who would have thought,’ said Mrs. Mistley presently, ‘that we should have one day to be waiting here for your husband and my son—waiting together for them to arrive together? It almost seems as if Providence had heard all our girlish vows ; for we have come together again after all those years, and our children will be friends !’

‘Yes,’ said Mrs. Wright absently. ‘Yes, our children will be friends !’

Then they relapsed into silence. Mrs. Wright betrayed a greater impatience than

her companion. It had been promised that after this expedition her husband should leave her no more, and she was terribly afraid that something would yet come in the way of this pleasant arrangement. As the time wore on, she began to picture to herself a thousand-and-one dangers which in reality never existed. Now she knew that he was in a civilized land where travelling was a pleasure, unattended by hardship or danger; but he was not home yet.

It was only natural that Mrs. Mistley should be thinking of her son at that moment, and the thoughts were apparently pleasant, for occasionally she smiled with a passing gleam of pride in her eyes. Her two sons appeared to her maternal vision such as any mother might reasonably be proud of. In accordance with an old tradition of her husband's family, she had made one a soldier and the other a sailor. Soldiers and sailors the Mistleys had been from one generation

to another, rising as high as hard blows could bring them, but caring nothing for honours or titles. Ambition was not infused into the Mistley blood—at least, it had never shown itself, until Winyard laid aside his idle sword to wield the mightier pen. And the astute little lady recognised in this action the handiwork of a certain restless energy which had been inherited from herself, along with other characteristics more or less Gallic in their vivacity and quickness. At first, Mrs. Mistley had not approved of this sudden change in her son's life ; but by the time the letter announcing it had reached her, things had gone too far to make objection of any use : so, like a wise woman, she held her tongue. Now, she recognised and frankly acknowledged that Winyard had been right.

Her feelings as she waited for the train that morning were strange. After a three years' absence her son was coming back, and the day when he had left was as fresh in her

mind as ever. She could recall the very expression of his face as the train moved away — a handsome boyish countenance, with a peculiar, rigid purity of outline expressive of too great a degree of refinement for comfort in this world. He had left England a merry, reckless boy, with no great sense of responsibility in life ; and now he was coming back a man, with a name among his contemporaries, with a definite purpose in life. She wondered vaguely whether he would be much changed, whether she would now find him thoughtful and serious.

It was hard for Mrs. Mistley to realize that this was really her son—her youngest born, over whose tiny crib she had stood twenty-three years ago, with staring dry eyes and a breaking heart, while in the next room lay the still form of his dead father. Could this man with the burden of life already upon his shoulders be that same helpless

piece of infantine humanity? Woman-like, she began to think of his appearance, and pictured herself walking by the side of a squarely-built bronzed man, with a heavy moustache, and that queer *Indian* look in his eyes that she knew so well. Nor was this mental portrait so very far from the truth. It was a modification of the memory of her husband, but Winyard Mistley was a cleverer man and more intellectual than his father. His face was cut upon a keener mould, the features were lighter in their modelling, and expressive of a refinement almost amounting to nervousness. Charles Mistley was in reality more after the type of his father, with the same tranquil Saxon strength visible in his eyes.

At last there was a bustle in the station, and a troupe of porters assailed the platform, arriving in the most astonishing manner from all sides. Then the great locomotive came clanking in, with a mighty sense of its

own importance and general superiority over the mere local engines around it.

A moment later Mrs. Mistley was looking into the face she had so longed to see. Even amidst the confusion and excitement of the greeting, she found time to marvel that there was so little change in it—a little browner perhaps, with a hard dry look which spoke of great hardships borne manfully, and testified to exceptional powers of endurance.

‘Where is Charlie?’ were Winyard’s first words. While his mother was explaining that her younger son would be detained at Greenwich until later in the day, the Colonel approached with Mrs. Wright at his side. No form of introduction was attempted; the old soldier came forward with outstretched hand, and as he took Mrs. Mistley’s fingers within his, he bowed with a peculiar old-fashioned courtesy, which conveyed a wondrous amount of admiration and respect.

‘Mrs. Mistley!’ he said, ‘I should have known you anywhere. We carried a photograph of you in our despatch-case for many months. I think Winyard considered it the most precious document there.’

‘And which,’ added that respectful youth gaily, ‘the Colonel left lying about one night in the rainy season, the consequence being that it all came ungummed, and nothing was left next morning to the eyes of a bereaved son but two sticky rolls of wrinkled paper, one of which was found adhering to the person of a native dog. How do you do—Mrs. Wright? . . .’

The young fellow became suddenly silent, and turned rather hastily to find the luggage. There were unshed tears in Mrs. Wright’s eyes, and perhaps he was not quite sure of himself; at all events, he was by no means sure of the Colonel, who, like many brave men, was afflicted with a soft heart.

Presently the two small boxes were found

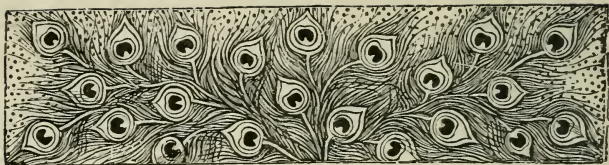
and placed under the care of a porter, who shouldered them both at once with much zeal. He saw how the land lay, and knew that his reward would be greater than his deserts.

There were now many travellers upon the platform, and the usual bustle attendant on the arrival of non-phlegmatic foreigners on these tranquil shores supervened. It therefore occurred that no one except Winyard Mistley observed a tall fair-haired youth who had evidently been awaiting the arrival of the train. In appearance this young man was distinctly Germanic, although his face was of a more refined type than one usually meets with in the Rhineland. Although his presence on the platform appeared to be other than the mere result of accident, he did not give one the impression that he was there to meet a friend. The thought passed through Winyard Mistley's mind that this man was watching the Colonel

and himself, but at the moment he did not attach much importance to the suspicion, though he remembered it later.

After having arranged that Mrs. Mistley and her two sons should dine with them in Seymour Street that evening, the Wrights drove away, and mother and son were left alone together.





CHAPTER V.

THERE is in the lamentably uninteresting parish of Lewisham a long street where the numbers of the houses attain to three figures. Standing at the end of this street, one has before one's eyes a lesson in perspective, from which it could be easily imagined that Mr. Vere Foster had taken those strange diverging lines by the help of which he undertakes to instil the rudiments of perspective into the densest minds.

As a rule, there is no object to spoil the purity of line from end to end: the grass-grown road knows the pressure of a

daily milk-cart and a rare cab ; otherwise nothing.

From number one to number one hundred and forty-nine on the one side, and from number two to number one hundred and fifty on the other, the houses bear such a deadly resemblance to each other that the oldest inhabitant of Prout Street, a bank-clerk of regular habits and mechanical mind, is compelled to look at the number on his own door before trying the latch-key, and his house is opposite the fourth lamp-post on the left-hand side. For those who live between the lamp-posts the difficulty is naturally greater, and it is on that account that Mr. Sellarar (who is in some manner connected with the City dinners, though his name never appears in the list of guests), occupying number forty-eight, invariably spends a portion of the night, or, to be more correct, early morning, in trying the effect of his latch-key upon the lock of number

fifty, which house is inhabited by the two Miss Parks of an uncertain age.

Number fifty-one was occupied by Mrs. Gredge, a lady who, like the blind beggar, had seen better days. After the manner of elderly females of a brilliant past, Mrs. Gredge let lodgings, and it is with her lodger that we have to do.

The yellow rays of sunset shone in the sky over the roof-line from number forty-eight to fifty, and lighted up the bare parlour of number fifty-one, Prout Street, Lewisham. The hideous wall-paper, representing innumerable baskets of impossible flowers hanging from festoons of blue ribbon attached to nothing, was shown up in all its brilliant crudity by the searching light.

Small portions of this flowery abomination were hidden by framed prints, of which the poor workmanship and general vulgarity prepared one for the information in the

corner of each, to the effect that they were specimens of German enterprise.

In strange contrast to the brilliant wall-paper and repulsive prints, there was suspended in one corner of the room a small but beautifully worked representation of the Virgin and Child. It was an emblem of the Greek Church, and before it hung a tiny oil-lamp of red glass with a floating wick for ever burning.

The workmanship was rather finer than that of the ordinary Russian 'ikon' or shrine, suspended in every house and homestead of the great Empire. The body and raiment of the Virgin and Child were of stamped silver, and small spaces were left in the metal where the faces and hands appeared, beautifully painted on wood behind the silver. The painting itself was of the simple, smooth style which reminds one of the work of Botticelli, and seems to lend itself particularly to religious subjects.

At the table in the centre of the room sat a young girl. She did not look more than twenty years of age, though at times the expression of her face was almost that of a woman of forty. From a low white forehead, her dull flaxen hair rose in a soft curve before it yielded to the black ribbon that bound it in a loop low down on her neck. The light rested softly on it, but failed to draw from its smooth bands any gleam of life. She wore it parted at the side and brushed well back. Her delicately cut face was pale, and there was a peculiar drawn look about her lips, which were very red. Mrs. Gredge knew her lodger by the name of Miss Marie Bakovitch ; to many lovers of music in London she was known as the Baroness de Nantille.

The whole life of her being seemed to be centred in her eyes. They were intensely blue, with an almost metallic gleam.

Before her on the table was a newspaper

which she was slowly scanning, column by column. She followed the line of columns with a pencil ; not like one who is reading word for word, but as if she were searching for some particular news, the rest of the printed matter being indifferent to her.

The fingers that held the pencil were singularly white and beautiful, but they trembled painfully as if from inward excitement.

The girl's pale and striking face, more beautiful than pleasing ; her painfully searching eyes, her small trembling hand, and the softly rounded active figure, all seemed to imply an unusually nervous and impetuous temperament.

She appeared to be very ignorant as to the system followed out in the formation of an English newspaper, as she read through the leading articles with the same anxious haste as she devoted to the advertisement columns.

Suddenly she laid down her pencil, and looked towards the window with expectation visible in every feature. She had not been mistaken. From below came the sounds of hurried footsteps on the deserted pavement, then the creaking of an iron gate.

She could hear the distant tinkle of a bell, and a few moments later some one knocked hurriedly at her door.

‘Come in!’ she said in a quiet voice, and she leant back in her chair without looking towards the door.

A tall graceful man entered the room.

‘Marie,’ he said, ‘he has come. He is in London!’

The girl did not move nor look towards him; her eyes were fixed on the yellow sky over the roof of number forty-eight.

‘He has come . . . he is in London!’ she repeated after him, as if to force the news into her own brain.

One white hand was lying idly on the table, extended towards the young man.

He took a step forward, and raised her fingers to his lips. Then he seemed to remember the shrine in the corner of the room, for he bowed towards it, and crossed himself rapidly but with reverence.

For some moments he looked at the fair girl in silence ; she was slowly pressing the hair back from her temples. Then he suddenly fell on his knees at her side, and seized her two hands in his. He forced her passionately to look at him.

‘ Marie, Marie ! ’ he exclaimed in Russian ; ‘ for the love of heaven give this up ! It is madness ; his life will make no difference ; you can do no good by the sacrifice of yours. Think of your mother, your sister ; think of me ! You cannot love me, or you would not hold to this mad purpose ! ’

She looked down at his pale miserable face with an expression which any but a

lover would have read as fatally kind and affectionate.

‘Yes, Ivan dear,’ she said in a faint weary voice, ‘I love you. But I love my country first; O Ivan, will you never understand what this love of one’s country is? I reproach myself again and again for filling your brave heart, so that there is no room in it for patriotism. No, no, a thousand times no! I cannot give it up. Think you that I travelled to the South, then home to holy Moscow again, only to leave it in a few days for this doomed land, to give up my inspired purpose after all? No, it cannot be. Let me think what must be done. I am dazed, like the hunter who suddenly finds himself face to face with his quarry. Where is he?’

‘He is living with his mother in Bedford Place, London. Marie, I will warn him if you do not listen to me. It is my duty. I must save you at all risks.’

‘Ivan,’ said the girl with a passionate

thrill in her calm voice, 'if I thought you would warn him I should kill you now as you kneel there! God who gave me this work to do will help me to execute it! Besides, has he not been warned, more than a year ago, and he simply ignores it?'

'Then threaten him,' said the young man, rising and walking towards the window.

'Threaten him!' retorted the girl, shrugging her shoulders. 'You do not know these Englishmen, Ivan. Threats are to them what oil is to a smouldering cinder—it brings out the fire that no one thought to be there.'

For some moments there was silence in the room. The young man stood with his back towards his companion. He was exceptionally tall, with a slight droop in the shoulders, which suggested a man of thought more than of action.

His slim white hands rested on the centre woodwork of the window, and he was gazing

abstractedly at the deserted road, parched and grass-grown. Gradually there came life into his eyes, the inward light reflected from an alleviating thought within his brain.

He turned slowly, and his eyes rested thoughtfully on the young girl's bent head for some moments.

‘Marie,’ he said at length, ‘if I swear to kill him, will you marry me to-morrow? Let me call you wife for one day, and I will be willing to take the risk of getting away when . . . when it is done. We can go to America; my art will keep us comfortably there. See, I have only been in England a few days, and I have already sold many sketches. It is a strange way to win a wife, by assassinating a man whom I cannot but admire!’

‘Admire!’ echoed the girl. ‘The man, the individual, does not come into my thoughts at all. It is the work he has done and will carry on, unless he is stopped; the harm he

has done to our country. What care I if he be a scoundrel or a patriot, young or old, beloved or alone in the world? It is the same to me, Ivan. It is the power within him I aim at, not the man himself. You cannot realize what harm this man can yet do. You are half a Nihilist, and think that our country's ruin will be brought on by a succession of Emperors ; they at least are patriots. No, no ; if you men would only combine, the whole world could do no harm to us ! It is the inward rottenness of the people's patriotism that drags down Holy Russia.'

' Will you let me do it ?'

' No, Ivan. I cannot. God gave me the work to do, and I must not shirk it. If He intends me to escape when it is done, He will help me ; if not, I will take . . . what comes !'

Her blue eyes flashed with the fire of religious fervour, but she leant across the

table and laid her hand on his, as if to soften the cruelty of her own decision.

The girl looked very frail and nervous as she sat in the fading light. There was, however, a strange set look about her mouth ; her level red lips were pressed together with a firmness betokening a marvellous determination for a girl of her physique.

The young man rose from his seat and walked to the window, pressing the soft straight hair back from his forehead.

‘ If you forget your own mother,’ he threw back sharply over his shoulder, ‘ you cannot overlook his. What has she done that you should punish her ? She is no doubt proud of her son, who after all has done nothing but his duty, though God knows he has done that well !’

‘ I think of nothing, Ivan—I think of no one. All must be sacrificed to the good of the country ! Am I not willing and ready to risk my own life——’

‘And throw aside my love,’ interrupted the young man.

‘For the holy cause? Can you not give up something, Ivan? Though I married you, I could not make you happy. It is not in me to be content with the trivial occupations of a wife and . . . a mother. I cannot rest now; I often think, Ivan, that there will be no rest for me on earth.’

She spoke in a cold, weary voice, as though the words were forced from her by some superior will, not emanating from her own being at all.

Then he came towards her with both hands outstretched.

‘Only marry me, Marie,’ he urged in a voice hoarse with suppressed passion. ‘Marry me, and all will come right. Rest will come, and peace—ah! and love, Marie; for you do not love me now. I can see it in your eyes. We will go away, and find a new home in a new land. There we can

watch things from afar, for we can do no good ; the sacrifice of our happiness to the cause can do nothing. It is not thus that the fate of an Empire is ruled. It is in higher Hands than ours ; or, as some say, it will work itself out despite emperors and statesmen, despite lives thrown away and homes made desolate. If there were work to do I should be among the first, and you know that, Marie. It is weary work to pass one's life in idle waiting for a crisis that never comes ; but it is written, and we cannot but obey. When the time comes, there will be no call for statesmen and politicians ; the people will do the work, the people will find the leaders. Ah ! Marie, if you would only listen when I tell you that this is no work for women, these are no thoughts for a woman's mind ! Everything in the past points to it, everything in the present confirms that God will *not* have such work done by a woman's hand. He will never bless such an undertaking.'

Mental resistance in women is usually totally without respect to physical force. The man might have argued and persuaded till dawn, but it would have been of no avail. The frail girl was as intent on her purpose as the most determined man, and with the additional incentive of a woman's unreasoning belief in her own convictions, which will not listen to the most direct and convincing argument, while it laughs at milder measures.

The man knew this, and yet, with the stubborn calmness of his Northern blood, he still sought to appeal to her reason. At the same time, he attempted to rouse in her some faint reflex of the passion within his own heart. He took her two hands again; he drew her towards him, and stooping till the soft wavy curls about her temple touched his lips, he spoke fervently and with flashing eyes that vainly sought hers.

But she, forgetting that her two hands were prisoners, that his arm was round her, and that his hungering lips were close to her own, still clung to her argument merely as an argument, and not with the feeble resistance of one who has the faintest idea of yielding.

‘And Charlotte Corday,’ she said, ‘her life was not thrown away.’

The man’s patience was almost sublime, but he relinquished her fingers suddenly with a little movement, as if to cast her hands away from him.

‘She!’ he said bitterly—‘Charlotte Corday, what good did she do? Think you that France would have been different now had she never existed? No, no; events were moving on slowly and irresistibly, she neither accelerated nor retarded them; and she has left a lasting example of violence behind her for other women to follow. Think, Marie—think what you are doing! It is murder,

the most vile of human crimes ; not even murder with the extenuation of hot blood, but a calm and unflinching thirst for the life of a fellow-creature, and he a man who has served his country as few men have. He has fought an open fight ; dealing with the most treacherous and unreliable miscreants, he has ever been the soul of honour ; no mean subterfuge has stained the brilliancy of his diplomatic skill—would that I could say the same of our own countrymen !

By dint of praising this man, the passionate young Russian student had gradually grown into the habit of attributing to him virtues which he perhaps did not possess. Nevertheless he was a true champion, though he had taken up the sword from purely selfish motives.

‘ He may be doing his duty towards his country,’ said the girl, with the cool cruel judgment of an Inquisitor, ‘ but from what motives ? These Englishmen are no patriots ;

they do not possess that burning love for their native land that lies in our Russian hearts, Ivan. Think you they would go cheerfully to the horrors of Siberia, content that they had made one attempt, failure though it may have been, to loosen one stone of the structure they pit their helpless strength against, as flies against a gravestone? These English fight for the love of fighting, whether it be with sword or pen; and then when it is over, they are quite content to go home and spend their lives in profitless leisure. No, Ivan; do not speak to me of duty to country, and of patriotism. It may or it may not influence this man—this . . . Winyard Mistley, for we do not know him; but if it is the case, he is not like the rest of his countrymen. Ah, if I could only meet some one who knows him, who could give me some opinion as to his motives! He never speaks; he never shows himself; you never hear his opinion quoted.

He seems to laugh at fame, and yet he is the most powerful of them all. He works silently, like a mole ; but when the work is done he seems to forget it all, and is almost a boy. What did Marloff, the cleverest of the Government agents, find out on the voyage home to Suez ? Nothing, nothing at all. He wrote to me of a light-hearted recklessly merry boy, whom he could not believe to be identical with the man he was told to watch. He spoke of one who was ever the foremost in organizing amusements on board—think of that, Ivan, organizing amusements and keeping the whole ship merry and joyful ! Ah, it is maddening ! This man, who can find time between the rounds of his amusements to outwit our cleverest diplomatists, and then laughingly resume his pleasure. I tell you he is laughing at us, laughing at our best statesmen ; and you speak to me of threatening such a man as this ! It is strange . . . it is

strange—that he can be the brother . . . of the sailor !’

The girl stood by the window in the rapidly fading light, twining and intertwining her slim white fingers, while her lips quivered with an almost childish passion.

‘ Marie,’ said the young man, in a slow cold tone, ‘ has it never struck you, has the idea never passed through your brain, that some one else is laughing at you ? Have you never thought that the Government, our own Government, whose duty it is to watch over all its people, is making a tool of you ? They fear this man, and with good reason ; therefore they would not be sorry if he were removed from their path. They dare not suggest such an action, but they dare to forward it indirectly, so long as they are themselves safe from suspicion. They pretend to know nothing of you, and to be ignorant of your motive in coming to England ; but why was it made so easy for you

to leave Russia? and why was I, the son of a Nihilist, and myself a suspected Nihilist, allowed to come to England with you? Can you not see that they do not wish to make inquiries? They allowed Marloff to write to you, because you pleaded a personal interest in this man. For all they know, this Englishman may have wronged you personally; doubtless they will say it was so. "Give the girl the information she requires," they would say; and the letter would be drafted from the Vasili Ostrov for Marloff to copy out in his own handwriting. If you carry out this scheme, this mad scheme of yours, Marie—think you that the Government will say a word for you? No! they will express to the English Government their sincere regret that this dastardly assassination should have been perpetrated by a Russian; an attaché will attend his funeral, and the English newspapers will by some means get hold of the information that

there has always been madness in your family !

‘ I have thought of that,’ replied the girl, ‘ and it only confirms my inward conviction that I am working for the good of my country. Ah, if I only knew his motives— if I only knew him !’

The girl was much more influenced by her own doubts than by the young man’s arguments, though perhaps these were indirectly fostering her doubts.

He was not slow to see this, and take advantage of it.

‘ Well, then,’ he urged, ‘ wait ; wait and watch him ; we may even get to know him. They are different from us, these Englishmen, for they can throw aside their work entirely for a time, and take it up again where they dropped it when the moment comes. He will probably be doing nothing now for some time, and then who knows what his next mission may be ? They are a universal

people these, and try many things; they have no discrimination in their judgment of men. Do they not make statesmen of their generals, and naval lords of their men of letters? Mistley may go into Parliament, and do nothing more in the world.'

'If he went into Parliament,' said the girl forebodingly, 'he would be more dangerous still.'

'Well,' urged the young man with pleading eyes, 'but at all events give him a week or a fortnight.'

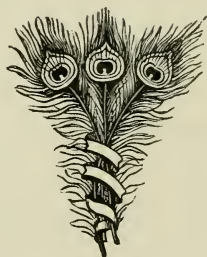
'Then I must leave this forsaken place, and live in London,' said the girl with determination.

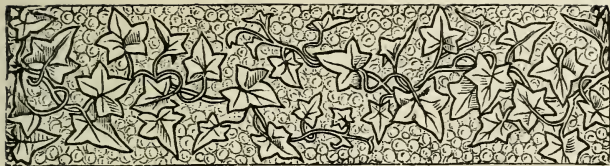
'Yes; I will take lodgings in Bedford Place, and you will join me there. You will be my sister again, Marie.'

'Yes, Ivan,' she said with a little weary ring in her voice, as she laid her hand on his; 'I will be your sister again!'

He raised the cool, lifeless fingers to his

lips, and left her alone in the darkened room, where the light of the sacred lamp cast its ruddy gleams upon the calm faces of the Holy Virgin and her Child.





CHAPTER VI.

TO Colonel Wright this home-coming was full of delight and sweet anticipation. His life had been broken up by many wanderings, many campaigns, and many separations. All that was now to be left behind, and before him lay a prospect of active leisure, a life of intellectual ease, of pleasure and loving companionship. He had passed so many years in the East, that he brought home with him an Anglo-Indian freshness and energy for home-pleasures. He was young enough to be still of an active mind, and leisure with him by no means meant idleness.

That first breakfast was an event to be remembered. So clean, so bright, so home-like was everything. Surely there never was a cloth so white, no silver ever shone so brilliantly as those forks and spoons. And never had happy father so fair, so dainty, so sweet a daughter to pour out his coffee, with just a little movement of shyness in the curve of her rounded arm.

‘Then they are coming this evening?’ remarked Lena when they were seated, looking across the table towards her father without ceasing her occupation of filling a coffee-cup, which manœuvre successfully directed the nourishing beverage into the saucer.

Mrs. Wright noted this result, and immediately gazed intently at the ceiling with a marvellous expression in her face, which distinctly gave one to understand that she saw the coffee in the saucer, knew how it came there, and from the entire proceeding

deduced that it is always well to look before one pours.

‘Yes,’ replied the Colonel. ‘They are coming this evening, the sailor being included.’

‘Mother,’ said Lena presently, ‘have you told papa about the invitation to Broomhaugh?’

‘Yes, and he is quite ready to go.’

‘Oh, I am so glad! Papa, it will be simply lovely. Charlie has told me all about it. It is a melancholy old house, built by some remote Mistley, who was a cattle-lifter, or a borderer, or something romantic. The Mistleys have lived there ever since—in the intervals between their wanderings. Great bare hills all round, and a little colony of pine-trees round the house, which is bleak and gray, like an old fortress. Below the house, at the foot of a sort of cliff, there is a trout-stream, where you can fish all day; Charlie knows every inch of the stream,

and talks very wisely about flies, "March-Browns," "Professors," and all sorts of imposing names. Then we are going to get up some theatricals ; we have arranged it all, and chosen the piece. Charlie says that his brother acts splendidly.'

' Oh yes ! He can do that !' replied the Colonel, sapiently wagging his head. ' He is always acting. In fact, it is very hard to say when he is, and when he is not. I have watched him listening to a long story, which he knew to be a fabrication from beginning to end, and the childlike innocence of his expression was a perfect study. He is the very man for theatricals ; he was always stage-managing something or other out in India.'

' Perhaps he will be too good for us,' suggested Lena ; ' but it would be very nice to have a really good actor for the principal part, because the whole piece depends upon it.'

‘Charlie?’ suggested the Colonel, with the ghost of a twinkle in his eye as he looked at his wife.

‘Charlie won’t take it,’ replied Lena, with perfect innocence. ‘He insists upon having a minor part, as he is to be stage-manager.’

‘What part do you act?’ asked Mrs. Wright.

‘Well, we have not quite decided yet. Charlie wants me to be the heroine, and a Miss Sandford, who lives close to Broom haugh, to take the part of a sprightly widow. Now I think I would do for a sprightly widow much better than for a devoted heroine; but Mrs. Mistley says no. Let me see . . . if I were the widow, Winyard Mistley would be my son—a source of endless woe to his relations; if I were the heroine . . . oh . . . he would have to make love to me!’

‘Ah! he would do that,’ said Colonel

Wright, with conviction. 'He would do that well !'

'I think I would rather be his mother,' said Lena.

'Nonsense !' exclaimed Mrs. Wright incredulously.

'I once saw him making love,' began the Colonel, in a tone somewhat suggestive of a long story.

'Indeed,' said Lena indifferently, and she extended her hand towards the morning paper.

'Yes,' continued the Colonel. 'It was one of the funniest sights I have ever seen, and yet Mistley was as grave as a judge. She was a Russian ; her complexion was of a dull yellow ; she appeared to be ignorant of the primary use of water, and she smoked very bad cigars. Added to that, she was somewhat older than his mother !'

'Why did he do it ?' asked Lena, smiling. She was more interested now in the

little story, and had laid aside the newspaper.

‘He wanted some information which we knew her to possess.’

‘Are you sure you did not make love to her too?’ asked Mrs. Wright with a smile, which the old soldier fully appreciated.

‘I tried,’ was the candid reply, ‘but could not get on at all. The best of it was that she half suspected what he was about; but she was so anxious to get some information out of him, that she encouraged his love-making. In fact, it was a game of cross-purposes.’

‘And who won?’ asked Lena.

‘Oh, he did,’ replied the Colonel, and he returned to his toast as if there could only have been one answer to that question.

Presently, after some moments spent in deep thought, Lena looked up with a twinkle of merriment hovering in her eyes.

‘I think, papa,’ she said, ‘that he will do

very well for the part we wish him to take. Your description of him sounds dark and mysterious, and that is what we want.'

'Excuse me, little one. I never said he was dark and mysterious. As it happens, he is rather fair and the very reverse of mysterious, for he is open and almost boyish ; though, indeed, his manner changes so much and so suddenly, that it is nearly impossible to say when he is in earnest or in fun. Generally the latter, I think.'

'Because,' continued the girl, 'it is a villain's part—a very nice villain, though !'

'The part he takes in life is that of the light comedian, I think,' said the Colonel, thoughtfully stirring his coffee. 'He usually plays the light comedian to my heavy schemer, if I may put it thus ; but then it is only because he has found it convenient to do so. People consider him a frivolous light-hearted boy, and he is content that they should do so ; but I know him to be different. The

fellow is a born organizer, foreseeing everything, ready for every emergency, which he meets with that imperturbable smile of his, as if he were enjoying himself immensely.'

'I am rather afraid of this paragon,' said Mrs. Wright, rising from the table.

'My dear,' replied the Colonel, who was occupied in selecting a cigarette from a very highly-polished leather case, 'if it were not for this paragon, I should very probably not be sitting here now. You must not let my praises prejudice you against him, as praise is very apt to do. Winyard Mistley is a clever fellow, and what is better still, he is sincere. He does his work well, and he does it because he loves it. It is such men as he who get on in the world—provided they do not marry.'

'Why should the poor man not marry, papa?' asked Lena, who was busy with some flowers at a side-table.

'Simply because marriage would com-

pletely spoil his career. You see, a man cannot go roaming about in disguise in the heart of Central Asia, when he has a young wife fretting her life away at home.'

Lena looked round, and then turned again to her flowers, which she continued to arrange thoughtfully for some moments. This was a new phase in man's existence which her father presented. She had hitherto (with some excuse, for she was young and fair) considered that love and marriage were the two crowning events of a man's life, around which all those dreary years of early youth and late old age circled like planets round the sun, gaining their light, their very being, therefrom. And now her father, who was no cynic, calmly laid the fact before her, that a man may find a life's happiness in the building up of a career, in imprinting upon the sands of time his own particular footstep. And (alas, poor Cupid !) what was still more lamentable, there was on the face of it a

certain reason in the argument that love and a wife could, on occasion, be nothing less than encumbrances.

She was not by any means convinced, however, and smiled a little to herself. You and I, fellow-traveller, can smile a little too. We know what a fell destroyer of man's career that tiny-winged god can be, when once he gets his range and settles to his aim. We know that ambition crumbles away before love, as a sandheap before the rising tide. But Lena knew none of this. She only felt that there was something wrong, or that there *should* be, in this argument; and her next question was of some weight.

'Is that his view of the case, or yours?' she asked demurely.

'Mine, but Mistley knows it to be true.'

'And,' continued Lena very indifferently, 'will it be his mission to roam about in Central Asia in disguise?'

'Probably,' replied the Colonel, who

promptly seized this little opening to launch forth upon his favourite topic. ‘ Probably. You see, he is the only living man who knows his way about those parts. There is no doubt about it that the movements of our white-coated friends must be watched closely, and the Government are beginning to recognise it. Mistley is the man to do it, and if they send anyone they will send him. It will be a difficult mission and a dangerous one ; what we have been doing is mere child’s play compared to it. I am getting too old for it now. The old folks have to make way for the young ones sooner than they quite bargain for ; but I make way for Mistley with pleasure, for I know that he will do the work better than ever I could ! And it will need the best men we have ; there is more going on out there than people think. It is a strangely overlooked land ; people here think of it only by fits and starts, once in every six months or so, while all the time those

fellows are working and scheming ; plotting with native potentates, learning the resources of the country, and generally forwarding the cause of Holy Russia. One day Central Asia will be opened out, suddenly and completely, by the biggest fight the world has ever seen. It has not come in my time, it may not come in Mistley's ; but come it will, as sure as fate.'

Lena remembered these remarks later, when she could compare with them Winyard Mistley's views upon the subject, of which he was accredited with so great a knowledge. The younger man took a less alarming view of the case ; but while exercising a greater reservation, he spoke with a certain confidence, which, however, might or might not have been sincere. Winyard Mistley had a peculiar aversion to the subject of his travels, past or future, being discussed in the presence of ladies, and by some instinct the Colonel avoided any such mention when he was there.

It is to be feared that, beyond a mere objection to talking ‘shop,’ Mistley had rather a poor opinion of a lady’s discretion. Like many a wiser and more experienced man, he was of the opinion that politics are no woman’s study. Even in his limited diplomatic experience, he had found means of discovering that in any phase or walk of life, a woman has not the power of sinking her individuality. Her own personality is uncrushable ; those strange unreasoning opinions, instinctive hatreds, and unaccountable loves which we men can never understand and never be too thankful for, clearly demonstrate that she was not constructed or intended for that cold, selfish science we call politics.

‘I know,’ said Lena, partly to herself and partly to her mother, when the Colonel had left the room—‘I know I shall be disappointed in him.’

Mrs. Wright said nothing. She was stand-

ing near the window with the newspaper in her hand ; but she was looking over it into the sunlit street. She was thinking of the lives of two women who had married soldiers—lives that had not been quite a success—lives made up of weary waiting and anxious watching ; and running through these thoughts was a vague desire that this visit to Broomhaugh might yet be avoided.





CHAPTER VII.

THE language of conversation is woefully limited. Whatever our feelings or our nature may be, we say what we wish to say by usage in precisely the terms that usage may dictate, and in the self-same words as are employed by thousands of other mortals to express the passing thought. Thus we may pass hours in the presence of a fellow-creature—hours made pleasant by the flow of easy conversation, and yet at the end we know no more of that fellow-creature's inward soul than we did at the beginning. Opinions may have been exchanged, but doubtless they were

nothing more than mechanical phrases expressing a stereotype idea. Views of men and things may have been asked and given ; but these views are as original and individual as the colourless photographs of a lovely scene with which enterprising manufacturers of useless little wooden boxes love to disfigure their wares, and which cannot fail to impress upon every observer the fact that they are turned out by the dozen. The truth is, that our thoughts are the slaves of the tongue. They may conceive wondrous ideas and opinions, but the tongue refuses to speak them—it prefers the well-trodden paths of easy and ready-made phrases. When, however, we take up a pen, our thoughts often gain the upper hand. Old conceits, long overlooked, wake up in the silent pigeon-hole of the brain where they were hidden ; and lo !—set down in black and white, to be read by the world and sacred to none, are the secret thoughts we would not dare to

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speak to any living being. It seems that the pen has the power of making men forget their vain individuality.

But, thank Heaven, it is not vouchsafed to all, this outlet of the pen! Many put their thoughts into music ; many into pictures ; and some into song. Of these, the musicians are the more numerous. Not that they compose music, and thus express what in them lies ; but, in playing on whatsoever instrument, the music of whatsoever composer, their whole soul goes into their fingers, and they forget their audience, they forget everything. For them the *allegro's* and *piano's* and *pppp's* have no meaning. The composer's intention comes to them instinctively, and all they know is that the harmony in some manner fits into the train of their own unexpressed thoughts. Perhaps this is why we may hear sweeter, truer music from a girl practising in an empty room than has ever thrilled out from a

platform, over the heads of an appreciative audience.

Lena singing and Lena in everyday life were two very different persons. To the ordinary world she was merry and light-hearted, rather frivolous perhaps, totally without romance, and probably heartless. So thought such people as had never heard her sing, or had not attended while she was singing ; or again, whom she did not consider worth singing to. Combined with a sweet, clear voice and a true ear, she had the rare power of imparting a meaning to the words she sang. No song of hers ever seemed trivial or senseless. In wandering through the world, it has usually been the experience of the present writer to hear a drawing-room audience burst into rapturous ‘ Thank you’s ’ and ‘ Who is that by’s ? ’ the very instant that the last note of the singer’s voice had died away. When Lena Wright ceased singing, there was generally a little

pause before anyone expressed their thanks. It is of no great importance perhaps, this momentary silence, but yet it may be worth mentioning. Sometimes Lena noticed it, and then a passing look of embarrassment came into her eyes as she turned from the piano.

Most people had known the Lena of everyday life first, and first impressions hold to the memory like a woman to her argument—through contradiction and undeniable evidence, through ridicule and sober reasoning. Those obstinate first impressions never die; and we look back through the greater events and crises of a friendship to them, and believe in them still. Thus it was that Lena Wright had, among certain of her friends, the reputation of being somewhat worldly, a little frivolous, and not entirely averse to mild flirtation. No one accredited her with any share of that shy romance which, to a girl, is as the dewdrop to the tender bud. There were, it

may be mentioned in passing, two notable exceptions to this rule—an old and a young man, both of whom were gifted with a singularly reliable power of observation. Laurance Lowe looked upon Lena as a fair replica of the fairest human picture he had ever studied ; and he could not well make a mistake, as he himself had blended the colours for both. It does not often occur that a man influences the life of mother and daughter in the same way ; but when such does happen, the two women will be very similar in character. Charles Mistley was the second exception ; he had only known Lena for three years ; but that dangerous intimacy which springs up between the children of old friends had grown rapidly with these two, and he knew the girl's character and nature as her own mother did not know them. A dangerous study for a young man, you will say—these inner depths of a maiden's heart ! Alas ! perhaps it is so ; but fire is a mighty pleasant plaything, and has been found

so since man existed, and maidens smiled upon him !

It happened that Winyard Mistley heard Lena sing before he spoke with her ; and in after years that first impression remained uppermost in his mind. He never afterwards doubted the presence of a deep true woman's heart beneath the gay and almost frivolous manner she chose to assume before the world. Perhaps he was judging in some degree from himself. He knew that the gay and somewhat shallow youth, known to the generality as Winyard Mistley, was not the true inner *thinking* man, whose ambition was fortunately tempered with a whole-hearted sense of patriotism rarely met with in these self-seeking times.

When Winyard arrived at the door of Colonel Wright's house in Seymour Street, the postman was just turning away from it, having dropped a letter into the box and given his recognised rap. Thus Jarvis, the old

soldier-servant, saw the shadow of a visitor upon the ground-glass of the door when he came for the letters, and did not wait for a second knock. The old warrior knew who this brown-faced stranger was at once, and stepped back, holding the door wide open.

Lena was singing in a small room immediately opposite the entrance, and the door of this room was wide open. The old soldier's movements were quick and noiseless as a soldier's movements should be; but Winyard was quicker, and with a touch of his hand he stopped Jarvis from going forward to announce him.

‘Wait a moment!’ he whispered.

Lena sang on unconsciously. She had heard the postman's knock, and recognised it; but was not expecting any particular letter, and therefore did not interrupt her song.

The two men stood outside the door, and listened in silence. The old soldier whose

fighting-days were done, and the young man whose time was yet to come. One a sturdy, powerful figure, very straight, with a peculiarly flat back and a square honest face—the other somewhat taller, of lighter build, lean and wiry, active as a cat. They could just see Lena's shoulder, and the play of her white hand and wrist. Occasionally, as she swayed a little to one side with the rhythm of her music, they caught sight of her dainty head, with the soft dry hair drawn well up and clustering down again.

It was a strange song that this light-hearted maiden was singing to herself, while awaiting the arrival of her mother's guests. A 'Farewell,' sweet and low as the sound of the sea at night when the sunset breeze is dying. There was a mournful, almost hopeless swing in the old-fashioned air; but the words were brave and strong. The words of a true woman to the lover she was sending away for ever; for a woman is always the

braver where love has no earthly hope. It was a song written and composed by a woman who was white-haired and a grandmother when Lena sang it; the only musical work of her life—the one sad song of her heart. Never having been printed, it was little known; and Lena had copied it from the manuscript-book of a school-friend. It happened that the girl was in the humour for singing on that particular evening. The day had been an eventful one, and she was looking forward to the evening. All this made her sing as she had rarely sung before.

When the last note of the accompaniment had died away, Lena swung rather suddenly round upon the music-stool, and found herself face to face with Winyard. He was standing with his overcoat still upon his arm, and at first Lena thought that it was Charles Mistley. So quick was her movement that she caught Winyard looking grave—a luxury he rarely indulged in.

Instantly Lena rose, and although she blushed, she smiled with perfect self-possession.

‘Mr. Mistley,’ she said, extending her hand, ‘I never heard you come in.’

Then they shook hands, and Jarvis vanished with Winyard’s coat.

‘I am afraid,’ said Mistley, looking a trifle guilty, ‘that I have been standing outside since the end of the first verse.’

Lena gave a little laugh, which was not quite free from embarrassment.

‘That was rather mean,’ she said.

‘I am afraid it was impertinent,’ said Winyard quickly, ‘now that I come to think of it; but at the moment I hardly thought of what I was doing. You see, I came in with the letters, and then, as soon as I stepped inside the door, I heard . . . you singing. I am afraid I prevented the man from interrupting you. I could not help it. You must make some allowance for a wanderer whose

manners have suffered, Miss Wright. You see, I have not heard anything . . . like that for three years, and I could not resist hearing it all ! Do you think I should have said "Ahem !" or banged my umbrella into the stand so as to let you know that some one was listening ?

'No doubt,' replied Lena, 'that would have been the proper course to pursue ; but it does not matter much, I suppose. If you like to listen to people practising, there is no actual harm in it. Let us go upstairs to the drawing-room. Our respective mothers are there. Papa is dressing, and Charlie has not come yet.'

Lena stopped rather abruptly, and led the way upstairs. It suddenly struck her that the Charlie whose name came so naturally from her lips was this man's brother, and that her easy manner of speaking of him must sound objectionably familiar.

Winyard gave her no time to think of it,

however. He saw the passing embarrassment, and came to her relief at once.

‘I have not seen Charlie,’ he said quietly, as he followed her, ‘since he went to sea. He could not get away from Greenwich till this evening, and of course the Colonel and I have been spending a happy day at the Foreign Office. I suppose he is a great big fellow now ; he was rather weedy when I went to India, but there was a promise of great strength about him.’

‘I think,’ said the girl softly, ‘he is the strongest man I have ever seen.’

Winyard looked up quickly into her face, which he could now see, as she had turned at the top of the stairs to wait for him.

‘In every sense of the word?’ he asked, for he thought he detected a deeper meaning in the tone of her voice than the mere words conveyed.

But he never received his answer, for at that moment the drawing-room door opened,

and Mrs. Wright came forward to receive him.

‘It is striking seven,’ she said with a smile. ‘You are here to the minute. I know now how it is that you never hurry, and always have time for everything, as the Colonel tells me you have. I need not introduce you two, apparently.’

‘No, it is not necessary, thank you,’ replied Mistley, standing aside to allow Lena to pass into the room. ‘We have settled all that, and I have got myself into trouble already!’

‘How so?’

‘By listening.’

‘Did you hear any good of yourself?’ asked Mrs. Mistley, who was waiting for them in the inner drawing-room.

‘I heard the most pathetic song I have ever heard,’ returned Winyard, glancing at Lena.

‘Pathos being so very much in my line!’

laughed Lena, as she dropped into a low seat.

‘And in Winyard’s!’ added that youth’s mother merrily. ‘You are neither of you very likely subjects, I am afraid!’

Winyard Mistley laughed, a clear, practical, ready laugh, as he sat down in obedience to Mrs. Wright’s gesture, and then quietly changed the subject.

‘The mariner is late,’ he said.

‘The mariner,’ observed Mrs. Wright, with a mock severity which betrayed a kindly feeling towards its object, ‘has a gentle way of lounging serenely in about ten minutes late upon most occasions. Never more than ten minutes, mind; and he does it so unobtrusively, so calmly, and so good-naturedly, that one cannot be angry with him. By-the-bye, Winyard—I suppose I may call you Winyard—when I said that we would be a family party this evening, in case you should be tired with your journey——’

‘Mistley is never tired,’ said Colonel Wright parenthetically as he entered the room, and after carefully raising his trousers so as to avoid dragging them at the knees, he sat down.

Mrs. Wright nodded in acquiescence, and continued :

‘When I said we would be a family party, I forgot that it would be necessary to explain that Laurance Lowe would be here. To your mother such an explanation was unnecessary, as she knows our ways. Mr. Lowe is such an old friend, that we consider him one of the family, you understand.’

‘I think,’ said Colonel Wright, in his peculiarly slow and somewhat hesitating manner, ‘I think that Mistley knows a good deal about Laurance Lowe. You see, we had a large amount of spare time upon our hands out there ; morning papers were not readily procurable, Mudie’s was some way off, and altogether we were thrown a good

deal upon each other's society, so we talked of home. Eh, Mistley ?

‘Yes,’ chimed in Winyard cheerfully ; ‘we got quite learned in each other's family affairs, and by dint of hearing extracts from letters, began to take an absorbing interest in the doings of people we knew nothing whatever about. I shall be glad to meet Mr. Lowe.

‘Laurance Lowe,’ said the Colonel sturdily, ‘is the most silent man and the truest friend I have ever known.’

Winyard Mistley nodded with a peculiar little acquiescent smile, which meant that he was not thinking very much about the subject under discussion.

‘A silent friend,’ he said presently, with a great show of gravity, ‘is as rare as he is valuable—— I think I hear Mr. Lowe upon the stairs.’

The next moment the door opened, and Laurance Lowe entered the room, closely followed by Charles Mistley.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE old man entered in his usual slow and deliberate manner. The Colonel advanced to meet him with outstretched hand and a hearty word of greeting.

‘ Ah, Laurance, I am glad to see you ! There’s life in the old dogs yet, although the young ones are growing so big around us !’

Lowe answered never a word. He took the outstretched hand in his thin strong fingers, and bowed as he pressed it with a quaint old-fashioned courtesy.

In the meantime the two brothers had met.

‘ Hallo, Charlie !’

‘ Well, Win !’

They were close to Lena when they shook hands, and she heard the characteristic greeting. She also saw the long slow glance of their eyes as each noted the work of the last three years in the development, bodily and mental, of the other’s forces.

As they stood thus together before her, she saw with feminine rapidity of thought that there was not such a marked resemblance between the brothers as she had at first imagined. What likeness there was lay rather in manner and carriage than in feature. She saw now that Charlie was a much bigger man than his brother ; also that he was fairer and with blue eyes, while Winyard’s were gray and quick in their glance. In one, the slow, sure characteristics of a Saxon predominated ; in the other, the quicker organization of a Dane.

Lena’s comparisons were at this moment

interrupted by her father, who came up and shook hands with Charles Mistley, dispensing with an introduction.

‘Ah,’ he said genially, ‘you should have been a soldier instead of a sailor! You are too big a fellow to be cramped up in a torpedo-boat. I am afraid we old soldiers think that every man should be a red-coat, and perhaps we’re right after all. I know that every time I hear the roll of the drum or the tread of trained feet, I look down for the gold lace on my arm, and think that if I had another life to live, I would try soldiering again.’

Winyard Mistley had turned away, and across the room his eyes met Laurance Lowe’s calm gaze. Mrs. Wright had been watching them in anticipation of that moment, and now she hastened to introduce them formally. One great secret in Winyard Mistley’s success was his ready adaptability to the circumstances in which he was placed as to

social surroundings. With the merry he could be merry, and silent with the silent. This was no *tour de force* with him, but a happy gift of which he was not fully conscious. Without devoting even a passing thought to the matter, he shook hands with Laurance Lowe without saying a word. The strength of the grip he received caused him some little surprise; but this was not betrayed in the genial gravity of his eyes as he met Lowe's solemn gaze.

To the young fellow, who, like all born travellers, was a keen observer of human nature, this unobtrusive old man was intensely interesting. He was too intelligent to fall into the common error of considering Laurance Lowe a mere cipher in Mrs. Wright's circle of friends. His silence was not the natural reserve of a self-absorbed man; nor did it emanate from the simple fact that his brain was fallow, and that he had nothing to say. Before the evening

was far advanced, Winyard had established these two discoveries to his own satisfaction, without betraying to anyone that he was watching Laurance Lowe. He observed that the old man followed the conversation, which, among such closely-allied friends, was perforce general; that no remark passed unheard, no sally was missed; but that he never spoke unless he was directly addressed, which occurred frequently on Lena's part, occasionally with the Colonel, and rarely with Mrs. Wright. Winyard also observed that whenever Lowe met Lena's eyes, the lines of his face, which were deeply drawn, especially immediately over his moustache, relaxed somewhat, and that a faint motion of his lips beneath the silky white hair took place. These phenomena constituted a smile.

There was, in Lowe, no desire to pose as a man with a story; a blighted being who lived in a hopeless past, whose interest in

life was dead. Indeed, nothing gave him so much pleasure as to sit as he was sitting this evening, among intelligent women, and travelled, genial men ; to listen to their views on men and things, however frivolous, however ridiculous, and to add that shadowy smile of his to the general merriment. And, when he was referred to, he invariably proved that his humour consisted of more than the mere appreciation of humour in others ; which is like the reflection of a candle in a mirror, inasmuch as it is light, but not original light. Many of us are capital mirrors ; but without the candle we are woefully dull.

Strange to say, it was these little flashes of humour that caused Winyard to realize the living pathos of this old man's existence. They came as a suggestion of wasted capabilities, of powers unheeded, of opportunities wilfully ignored. There is pathos in the sight of a man who, having tried, has failed ; but infinitely greater sadness is there in the

contemplation of him who will not try because he is indifferent. Winyard Mistley was just at that age when a young man is perhaps a little too self-confident (a fault which soon wears itself away). He was full of energy and life, and quite ready to try his capabilities upon any task—not with the blind self-reliance of conceit, but with a brave knowledge that he was ready to do his best, which might, after all, prove as good as the same commodity from the hands of any other man. If the situation of Prime Minister had at that time been offered to him, it is possible that he would cheerfully have expressed his willingness to try. To him, therefore, the sight of Laurance Lowe, a man whom he instinctively recognised as clever and capable—the sight of him, aimless, hopeless, indifferent, was not only pathetic, but it was disheartening and disquieting. Could it be that this energy, this restless desire to be pressing forward in the great

race, this qualified ambition, was only a momentary incentive? Could it be that there are, after all, other things in life worth striving for than fame, and the glory of placing one's chiselled stone in the great structure of an empire? Winyard Mistley's love of his country was exceedingly great; but, after all, it was only human, and we all know that in the flower of every human love there is a gnawing worm called Self, which, though often unseen, is sufficient to render it but a poor misshapen shadow of that other love of which we talk so much and know so little.

The young diplomatist knew well enough that the poorest in the land, the very humblest cripple of a shoeblack, may be a loyal and true patriot; but he also knew that for all the good such loyalty and patriotism could do, the man might as well be a black-hearted traitor. Therefore his ambition ran very smoothly with his sense of patriotism,

upon the principle that the higher he climbed the farther could his voice be heard.

It was not until after the ladies had left the room that the conversation turned upon the subject dearest to the Colonel's heart ; and then Mistley learnt with some surprise that upon this, as on every other question that had been raised, Laurance Lowe knew something. This tongue-tied, callous Englishman was one of the few who from the enervating security of peaceful Britain could look afar with watchful eyes and note the rising of that tiny cloud in the East, which at times seems about to rend the heavens with the fury of its lightning, and then again will dwindle away to mere vapour, floating over the blue ether of time. Winyard, being of a colder, less enthusiastic nature than the Colonel, was more correct in his reading of the public opinion in England upon matters Indian and Colonial. He was well aware that a fresh and daring encroachment upon the

frontier of our Indian Empire would rivet the gaze of every Englishman upon the sullen movements of the aggressor for the whole space of a week, provided some fresh excitement, some thrilling murder in Paris, or a shipwreck attended with graphic details, did not usurp its place in the public interest. But beyond that he was too wise to expect anything. He recognised, therefore, that Laurance Lowe was more learned on this question than the majority of Englishmen. But in this, as in everything, Winyard found that strange lack of enthusiasm, and even of interest. He found that Lowe's observations, keen and far-sighted as they were, confined themselves to the mere indifferent criticism of a looker-on, whose life or happiness could in no way be affected by future events.

Thus it came about that Laurance Lowe, who was no favourite with young men, added, that evening, to his scanty circle of admirers. The attraction, also, was naturally in some

degree mutual, as such friendships invariably are. Lowe was prejudiced greatly in Winyard's favour from the mere fact that he had proved such a valuable assistant to Colonel Wright, and also as the brother of Charles Mistley.

Lena also had that evening cast a little seed upon the broad earth by the mere singing of a plaintive song. It had fallen upon a spot where other seeds had taken root, and grew in strength already ; but within that little germ lay power and life to outgrow them all in strength and height and splendour.





CHAPTER IX.

AWAY up in the gently undulating land that rolls northward from the Cheviots to the Lammermuir and Pentland Hills lies the little town of Walso. Indeed, it lies upon the downward slope of Cheviot ; and the clean streets, now grass-grown and silent, have many a grim tale to tell of the warm blood trickling down their gutters into the glancing river, if stones could only speak. Walso is a town with a past history such as few can boast of—a history full of brave deeds and fierce horror, for it stood in the very midst of Border warfare

when the Cheviot burns ran blood, and the great silent hills echoed the ring of steel.

But now all that is past, and from it has grown up a prim clean little town, paved throughout with spotless stone. No brick in all the burgh can be found—stone, stone everywhere, as strong and clean and sturdy as any Walso man. Side by side the gray houses are set down, shoulder to shoulder as the brave old burghers were wont to stand when the Borderers were out. Up and down these narrow streets pass to-day a race of grave-faced men and tall women. Men with long slow limbs and broad shoulders, brown faces, golden hair, and gray eyes. These same gray eyes are strangely direct in their gaze, looking into one as if they were looking into the sea-fret—as, indeed, they do during half the year. Up the broad valley from the North Sea this fret comes stealing like a gray veil all moist with tears, and envelops Walso, with its attendant hills, in mystery. And so

the men possess a peculiar contraction of the eyelids, which makes shifty eyes feel shiftier—and so the women are blessed with complexions as purely pink and white as sunset over snow.

Life up here is conducted upon a slower principle than in the bustling South. Slow of movement, slow of speech ; but wondrous sure is this tall race of men and women. Taciturn about themselves, and not too genial to strangers, the men are reputed to be very shrewd and far-sighted, especially in matters pertaining to pasture, wool, and ‘beasteses.’ In fact, they, one and all, appear entirely capable of managing their own affairs. The women in Walso, as also (I am led to understand) in other parts of the world, must necessarily be of superior intellect to their spouses, as they find time not only to manage their own affairs, but also those of every other woman in and around their native town. One worthy woman there was, however, who by

experience had learnt discretion in its closest sense. This was Mrs. Armstrong, who let lodgings in the High Street. Her lodgers were mostly of the same habits and inclinations ; in fact, they were all trout fishermen. The pavement of the High Street, which had rung beneath many an armed heel, now knew again the touch of steel, but of a more peaceful metal. Day after day these patient anglers slouched down the street towards the river, taking long ungainly steps and swinging their heavily clad feet and legs with a slow rhythm which indicated powers of long endurance. These same anglers were no ornaments to Walso society, for it must be confessed that their appearance was uniformly disgraceful. One and all affected a very loose tweed coat, much dragged and misshapen by the creel-strap ; a tweed cap of a different pattern, embellished with the gleam of gut and gaudy fly ; a short pipe and a long stride ; stained waders, and greasy brogues. In the

morning they tramped heavily over the stones, with many a screech of polished nail and heel-plate ; in the evening they slouched along, leaving little trails of water after them. All wore the same calmly contemplative expression ; for your trout fisherman, whatever he may be in ordinary life, is a meditative being when he gets within sound of running water : loving solitude and seeking it, yet ready with a genial nod or word of greeting.

But now it happened that the busy tongues had really something tangible to thresh out between them, for Mrs. Armstrong had let her lodgings to a stranger much more interesting than an unobtrusive, indifferent fisherman. This was no other than a young lady, ‘a furrineer,’ as was generally supposed. The worst of it was, that no one in Walso could put forward, for the general benefit and information, a single fact concerning her. Mrs. Currie, the station-master’s wife, had seen her descend from the train, and was at

first inclined to consider her a 'likely enough' young lady—whatever that distinction might be worth—but on overhearing an inquiry as to whether lodgings were obtainable in the village, the worthy matron at once withdrew her mental observation. She had naturally expected that this was another visitor for Broomhaugh, as she understood that Mrs. Mistley had many 'furrineering' acquaintances; but that a young woman, 'ay, an' wi' good looks, too,' should arrive alone—that is to say, with no other companion than a diminutive maid, who spoke no word of honest English—why, the thing was 'pre-e-posterous.'

This event, following close upon the arrival at Broomhaugh of Mrs. Mistley, young Mr. Winyard, and several guests, among whom was a real 'cornel,' proved almost too much for Walso. This sudden influx of other folk's affairs in want of management was unprecedented, and it is to be feared that, in their

zeal for the good of others, many prominent ladies of Walso neglected sadly their own interests. Several tins of embryo bread, set before the fire on baking-day for the purpose of 'rising,' were allowed to rise and fall again by reason of evaporation ; and the two Misses Currie were disappointed of their new white dresses on Wednesday evening, because Miss Eghye allowed her tongue to overrule her needle. Their first dressmaker-made dresses, too !

As it was more or less generally understood that Mrs. Mistley was in some degree capable of managing her own affairs (though the advice of an experienced woman such as Mrs. Currie could surely never come amiss), the greater share of public criticism and assistance was kindly accorded to the young lady of foreign proclivities who enjoyed the hospitality of Mrs. Armstrong's roof. Now, this young lady was no other than Miss Marie Bakovitch, or, as she was pleased to call her-

self upon occasions, the Baroness de Nantille—a title enjoyed by her mother before that lady married the Odessa merchant, Peter Bakovitch, her second matrimonial venture.

With a gentle wonder at the glibness of her own tongue, the girl had told Mrs. Armstrong on arriving that she expected her brother Ivan in a few days. The old woman knew the responsibility of her position too well to abuse it by retailing to her neighbours incidents that might be injurious to her lodgers ; but the ways of this vague fair-haired girl were not her ways, and Mrs. Armstrong positively ached to confide the fruits of her observations to the ear of some sympathetic soul. According to her simple code of honour, she was bound by the laws of hospitality to protect and defend any person temporarily under her roof ; and, although there were many facts sorely troublesome to her mind—such as the affixing to her walls of a small picture of the Virgin

and Child, and the constant illumination of the same by an uncouth and uncanny little oil-lamp—Mrs. Armstrong succeeded in containing herself until the arrival of Ivan Meyer at Walso.

This took place two days later than the advent of Marie Bakovitch herself, and before the wonder of her coming had been fully discussed or exhausted.

Meyer soon discovered that the silence of the absorbed and dreamy girl was more likely to do harm than a discreet straightforwardness of speech. He therefore informed Mrs. Armstrong of sundry particulars concerning himself and his sister Marie. Without ill-treating the truth, he slipped round about it by that same path which at first looks so broad and easy, but soon becomes tortuous and hard to trace with reliant clearness.

Himself he described as an artist desirous of immortalizing some of the charming hill-side stream-beds hitherto familiar to fisher-

men alone. His sister Marie was delicate, of a nervous temperament, which could not fail to benefit by contact with folk of such well-known self-reliance and sturdiness of character. He was afraid that London, in which restless city they had been sojourning, was not by any means the proper habitation for poor Marie ; but Mrs. Armstrong would understand that a needy artist was compelled to live where there was a demand for pictures.

‘ Ay, dootless, dootless,’ replied Mrs. Armstrong. ‘ I dinna ha’ad much by pictures mysel’, but there’s folks that likes them !’

‘ Ye-es, Mrs. Armstrong,’ responded Meyer, without having the faintest conception of the good lady’s meaning ; but he knew the value of agreeing with a woman, especially if she be from the North country.

This and more he told her, for the purpose of having it spread through Walso, even as the seeds are spread over the earth by windy

impulse ; but the tongue of a Walso woman could ever beat the wind.

Ivan Meyer was young, and therefore full of hope, which is essentially a flower of spring-tide growth. To have constant intercourse with Marie Bakovitch was to this patient lover a source of happiness. His cold Northern blood allowed his mind such thorough control over his heart, and those latent passions which exist deep down in the soul of every man, be his eyes of calm blue or fiery black, that he could, at her bidding, in very truth cast away the lover and become a brother.

He still hoped to persuade the girl, whom he in his simplicity looked upon as possessed for the time being by a mental disease—though he did not suspect that the doctors had already commenced to give it a name—to give up her mad project of serving her country by a useless murder. Also he hoped, by the constant influence of his pre-

sence, to turn her thoughts to other things, and to bring back the sweet and merry little Marie of his boyhood. Yet behind the sublime light of Hope he vaguely felt the presence of a cloud. A dull misgiving was ever at the portals of his heart, awaiting the night hour, or the aid of some passing untoward circumstance, to effect an entrance.

He rather dreaded the first mention of the subject which occupied the girl's mind, and, though he did his best to talk of other topics, she took the very earliest opportunity of bringing it forward.

Mrs. Armstrong had just cleared away the remains of their simple evening meal, and set the lamp on the table. Meyer produced his portfolio and spoke of his latest sketches ; but the girl quietly placed her hand upon it so as to keep it closed, and looking across the table she forced him to meet her eyes, and said slowly :

‘ Ivan, what news have you ?’

‘He is here,’ replied the young artist reluctantly.

‘At Broomhaugh?’

‘At Broomhaugh. His mother is there also ; Colonel Wright, his wife and daughter as well.’

Marie Bakovitch sat for some moments in silence. Her hands, very white and beautifully formed, were lying upon the green tablecloth, with a peculiar stillness which was characteristic of the girl. It was a stillness without peace. Without raising her eyes she said presently :

‘And the other—the sailor?’ Her voice was singularly calm and indifferent.

‘He comes in a fortnight. At present he is detained by his duties at Chatham or Greenwich, my informant could not say which.’

‘When did the Mistleys come?’

‘On Monday, the same day as you, Marie.’

The girl nodded her head, as if in silent confirmation of Meyer's statement.

'Have you seen Marloff?' she asked suddenly.

'I have.'

'And you have the photograph, Ivan?'

'No,' replied Meyer, shaking his head slowly. 'The photograph has been destroyed—such were his orders!'

'But you have the verbal description.'

'Yes . . .'

'What is it?'

'“Of medium height, square shoulders. Looks military, walks lightly, is agile in his movements.” . . .'

'Yes—yes,' interrupted the girl impatiently. She had been following the description as if it were familiar to her. 'And his face?'

'“Face, intelligent and much sunburnt; eyes gray, of some penetration, though usually wearing a smile. Light moustache,

somewhat fairer than the hair which is brown. Profile good, and expressive of determination.”’

Meyer stopped. He had been reciting in the monotone of a schoolboy who knows his lesson well, but he had been watching his companion's face steadily, and now he saw her change colour. The faint pink flush left her cheeks, while the shadow beneath her eyes deepened. The brilliant redness of her lips was startling in comparison with her pallid face.

‘ Marie—Marie !’ he exclaimed, taking her cold hands within his. ‘ You are killing yourself with all this excitement ! For God’s sake listen to reason ! This man . . . ’

Marie Bakovitch rose suddenly and walked to the window, which was open, though the thick curtain was drawn across it. She jerked it back, and looked through the branches of a geranium plant, out into the deserted street.

‘I travelled from London with him,’ she said presently.

‘In the same compartment?’ inquired Meyer anxiously; he had risen and was standing beside her, looking down upon her fair head.

‘No, in the same train.’

‘Thank the Holy Virgin you did not know him!’ exclaimed he fervently.

‘I did know him,’ the girl replied softly; ‘I knew him by his resemblance to—to his brother.’

‘Marie!’ exclaimed Meyer suddenly, ‘Marie! You *must* wait. As long as he is here, he can be doing no harm. The moment he stirs from here, instead of placing difficulties in your way, I will help you.’

‘So you *have* placed difficulties in my way?’ she said wonderingly, as she looked up into his sensitive, feeble face; but he did not meet her gaze.

‘You will never understand my love for

you,' he said by way of reply, and his voice was wonderfully soft and patient.

As she looked at him, her blue eyes slowly filled with tears, and it was a proof of her ignorance of love that she did not hide them from her lover.

'Good-night, brother,' she said gently, holding out her hand.

'Good-night, Marie.' He took her fingers, and was about to raise them to his lips, when his eyes met hers. Something he saw there made him drop her hand, and cross the room to open the door for her to pass out.





CHAPTER X.

THERE is always something pathetic in a friendship between men of widely different ages. However great a tact the younger may display, he cannot always conceal the fact that there are resources of vitality and reserves of energy within him that the elder man has lost. He may slacken his pace upon the curve of a hill with infinite cunning, but it is probable that the elder man will detect the movement ; perhaps saying nothing about it, but that makes it only sadder, for silence can express greater pathos than any spoken language.

Mrs. Wright was not a sentimental woman ;

her heart was filled with that infectious joyousness which is as sunshine on a gray and barren land ; but when she saw her husband and Winyard Mistley together, an unaccustomed obstruction rose in her throat, and always a busy woman, she became busier than ever. This sight made her think more than was desirable of a little mound far away in an Indian churchyard, whereon the turf had thickened with the growth of twenty years. It took her back over that dim road which narrowed and finally vanished in the blessed perspective of time, and in her heart this brave lady wondered at her own cheerfulness.

One morning, soon after their arrival at Broomhaugh, this sudden glimpse of the past came to Mrs. Wright with unusual force. The Colonel was anxious to begin fishing without delay, and there was consequently a great display of fly-books and rods on the table near the window. Over these the two

men were bending their heads, absorbed in the disentanglement of dry and curling gut. Their brown hands occasionally touched as they cleared the loops and freed the spiteful hooks ; and Mrs. Wright, glancing over the morning paper, noted the slight trembling of one pair of hands and the deft steadiness of the sligher fingers. She saw the close brown curls almost touching the older head of gray verging on to white, and thought again of the infinite possibilities buried in that little churchyard far away, within sound of the roaring Indian surf.

‘I must get accustomed to seeing them together,’ thought the unsentimental woman, turning resolutely to the Parliamentary news.

Upon a chair near at hand was seated Adonis, a lamentably plain Irish terrier. Grave and expectant, he was watching with intelligent interest every movement, every preparation, doubtless thinking the while of the pleasant day he was going to have among

green hedges and soft grass, with here and there a succulent blade, over which to perform strange labial contortions, to the detriment of his personal appearance, but infinite benefit of his inner dog. In connection also with the last-named matter, he glanced occasionally towards Lena, who was helping Mrs. Wright to prepare sandwiches for the fishermen ; and when he looked that way he slightly lowered his ears and smiled a little, for Adonis was woefully impressionable, and loved a pretty maid.

At last the lines were ready and the casts made up with cunning combination of parti-coloured flies, tempting and gay, but not fulsome. At hand were also two gray flannel bags, with close neat seams of Lena's work, containing in cool moss a crawling, restless Gordian-knot of red worms, in case the fishy appetite should be too coarse for daintier fare.

Then Lena approached with a bright smile,

and two dainty packets neatly tied with a knot which would have brought a smile to Charlie's face had he been there to see. One she stuffed into her father's jacket-pocket, and held the other out to Mistley. But he unaccountably became clumsy at that moment, and all his fingers were employed with his rod. Somehow the joints would not re-enter the narrow bag constructed for their reception. So the ingenuous youth murmured, 'Thank you,' and glanced audaciously at the pocket of his rough fishing-jacket which hung conveniently open. The rod showed no signs of approaching submission, so Lena was compelled to drop the small parcel into the open pocket, which she did with much exercise of care, in order to avoid touching any part or portion of the coat.

'Then,' said Winyard with a great show of innocence, 'we are to be home by three o'clock, to ride over to Sandoe.'

Lena had walked towards the window, and was now standing just inside. She turned her head, after a little pause, and said indifferently :

‘That was what you arranged, but of course, if the fish are taking well, it would be a shame to drag you away from them.’

Winyard bowed low, and opened the large old-fashioned window for her to pass out on to the terrace.

‘You are very considerate,’ he said in a low voice, as he followed her.

This terrace was a charming feature of Broomhaugh. It was formed by an old wall built up sheer from the sloping bank of the Broomwater, and was paved by huge slabs of rough stone, now worn smooth by the tread of many feet. The house itself was low and gray, being built of the same stone. Grim and sturdy, it harmonized with the bare hills around and above it. Signs there were still of the old fortifications, notably the wall

forming the terrace, which had rendered Broomhaugh practically impregnable from the river-side in the olden times. Below it, amidst the whispering leaves of silver birch and mountain-ash, ran the little river—a trout-stream such as one finds only within the shadow of the Cheviots—and on this fair morning its gentle ripple scarcely reached the ears of those upon the terrace, for rain was sadly wanted. A downpour of two hours would convert the clear brown water into a yellow torrent rushing down to the sea, as if ashamed of its own impurity. Then would the air at Broomhaugh grow heavy with a dull roar rising from the tree-clad valley beneath, and old Lee, the gardener, would peer down through the branches and mutter : ‘ Eh, but she’s a big watter ! ’ As the waters gradually subsided, the old fellow was wont to hobble away to his little cottage, and there, with trembling clumsy fingers, would adjust his rod, and laboriously disen-

tangle his cast, in readiness for Mrs. Wright's suggestion that he should go down to the burn and catch a basket of fish for breakfast.

As Leña and Winyard paced slowly backwards and forwards on the terrace awaiting the Colonel, the ripple of the stream awakened within the young fellow's heart a fisherman's longing for the sight of running water. Only fishermen can understand this love of nature, for only they know the delight of wandering rod in hand up the bed of a stream with legs encased in waders, and the heavy swing of brogues at their ankles. Their sport, with its quiet concentration, gives time for a passing admiration of the solitary beauty around them, and the murmur of the glancing water is to their ears as the voice of one they love.

Men born among these hills may go to dwell in cities, they may change their mode of life again and again, until the days of their

youth lie away back in the perspective of the past ; but the sound of running water, and the smell of it, will bring a message back to them unaltered by the years that lie between, and the old love of solitude, disturbed only by the peaceful rill of water or the curlew's weird cry, will rise within their weary breasts again. The hand cramped with holding a pen will long to grasp the quivering rod, and the ears weary with city din will ache for the sound of the whistling line.

Presently Lena stopped at the corner of the terrace, and stood motionless, gazing down the narrow valley where, like a silver thread, the Broomwater ran its tortuous course.

‘I have never understood before,’ she said slowly, ‘what the love of one’s native country is. You see, I have never had a native country. We have always been wanderers upon the face of the earth. But when one can call a place like this one’s home, it is

very different—the most heartless person could not help being a patriot.’

‘And yet,’ said Winyard, ‘what wanderers we are ! It has even come to my being a professional wanderer, you see ; while Charlie is a sailor, which means that he will never be quite happy anywhere upon dry land.’

‘But still it is something to think of in your wanderings, that you have a home like this to come back to ; that these hills will be the same—the house, the stream, this old gray wall, everything. Adonis knows what I mean—do you not, you solemn old thing ?’

Hereupon followed an embrace which Adonis bore with good grace, but failed somewhat to appreciate.

‘I understand what you mean as well as Adonis,’ observed Winyard, with grave humility. ‘Although, perhaps, I do not look so solemn about it as he pretends to be. I understand it, and I suppose I feel it all ;

but the spirit of the tramp is very strong in the family, I am afraid. After all, it would never do to sit here all one's life, as we are sitting now upon this wall in the sunshine, admiring the scenery! If you were a man, I know you would not do it.'

'I wish I were,' she said softly.

'Thank goodness you are not!' he exclaimed fervently, in a low tone.

And then they sat there and said never a word, while Adonis watched them with his left ear slightly raised.

Presently the Colonel appeared at the open window, equipped for the fray, and eager to begin it. Instantly Winyard became the polite host, and, raising his hand to point down the valley, he said to Lena:

'Do you see that round hill with the steep incline on the south side? Follow that incline down to where the slope of the next hill cuts it, and just there you will see a faint blue line across the gap.'

‘Yes, I see it ; and that blue line is . . .’

‘The sea. That is called Mistley’s Gap. The sea is twenty-six miles from here ; and you can never see that blue line after ten o’clock in the morning. The people about here think that at that time the sea subsides, and falls below the level of the valley, on the principle that there is more water in the streams early in the morning than at any other time. In reality, it is of course a mere atmospheric peculiarity. There is a tale told by the shepherds that in olden times a band of Borderers hanged a Mistley in that gap. He was a sailor, and, as he was returning home after a long absence, they caught him and hanged him upon a rough sort of gibbet, in sight of his home and the sea.’

‘So that you know that at least one of your ancestors was hanged,’ said the Colonel, with his hearty laugh.

‘Yes,’ returned Mistley ; ‘and history tells

of others as well who came to grief in the same way, owing to some slight error of judgment regarding other people's sheep. We are an eminently respectable family. But if you are ready, we had better go.'

The two fishermen then arranged that Winyard should walk two miles down-stream before commencing to fish up, while the Colonel appropriated the water immediately below Broomhaugh. So they parted at the gate, and Winyard went swinging along the road at a pace that promised to make short work of the two miles.

The bright promise of early morning had received a cloudy check from the west, and now a gray day, if not worse, seemed a safe prognostication. In little more than half an hour the younger angler was at work, rejoicing in the familiar whiz of the flying line.

There are occupations wherein a certain mechanical portion of the brain is sufficient

to guide and inspire the hand, leaving the remainder free for other work. The steering of a ship is one of these ; hence sailors are a thoughtful race of men, holding quaint and original notions on the way and manner of living through a human life. Give a sailor the spokes of a wheel within the span of his arms—allow to pass unnoticed an unsightly bulge in one cheek—and during two hours, his ‘trick’ at the wheel, he will think you out as many solid thoughts as any philosopher of inky inclinations. The swaying compass, the pulse of the restless wheel, and the shivering of the topmost sail that curves its white breast to the horizon, are all well within the grasp of his mechanical brain ; that is, of the outer office, where the mere clerks are capable of dealing with the case, only knocking at the door of the sanctum occasionally, and asking advice when mechanism fails and authoritative decision is required.

It is a mistake to imagine that trout-fishing belongs to the above order of things. The man who seeks to catch this dainty fish mechanically will probably catch little beyond the lower branches of a willow across the water. Now this shows and fully establishes the mental superiority of trout over the rest of the finny tribe—their business must needs be transacted in the inner office.

Winyard Mistley possessed the happy power of giving his whole mind to whatever work or pleasure he might for the moment have in hand, and his entire attention was therefore accorded this morning to the slaying of harmless fish. When youth and a certain activity of brain, combined with a lifeless heart and a lively digestion, work in unison, there are few deeds within human reach that are not feasible, and none that are not worth trying. With practised eye and an untiring wrist the young fellow cast his cunning flies on to the rippling surface

of every likely pool. The fish were inclined to encourage duplicity and cold murder, for they invariably answered the call made upon them; not only the young and foolish, but large and burly fellows with misshapen mouths and stout hearts for an uphill fight.

While his master was engaged in studies piscatorial, Adonis was gravely employed in botanical research. With one vigilant eye devoted to the inward swing of the silvery line (his fly-catching days being over), he did not forget for one moment the pleasant chain of slavery that hung around his neck, and the spirit of sniffing inquiry was held in check by a stern sense of duty which forbade any straying away. Occasionally, also, Adonis considered it only polite and respectful to take an interest in and inspect the vanquished foe as he lay panting on the turf, if only in consideration of his master's feelings as a sportsman.

At first the stream ran through a level

meadow, where the grass was rich and green compared with the scanty brown covering of the hill. It was the widening of the valley, and the hills stood far apart, as if drawing back to make their farewell bow to the pleasant laughing water which did not despise their aged company, and brightened for a while with its smiles and glancing merriment their grave and timeworn melancholy.

As Winyard progressed up-stream, from pool to pool, by rippling shallows and stony runs, the vale narrowed in, and the great bare slopes began to dictate to the yielding water, and measure out its path. The voice of the stream grew louder as its existence became more eventful, and the difficulties thereof greater. There were big rocks to be circumvented, and to be laughed at when passed and gleefully avoided. Soon there were little leaps to be taken with smooth curve and snowy froth, whereunder lay the wise trout awaiting a chance worm torn from

the broken bank a little higher up. In and about these variations of flow lay deep and tranquil pools, where the water recovered its bright purity after the disturbing influence of eddy and fall. Here dwelt the larger trout—fish of a certain standing in life, with rights of way and habitation, originally acquired by strength of tail or fin, and now held by reputation and rights of long possession.

With gentle turn of wrist, and clever calculation of strength, duly allowing for the cool breeze hurrying down the valley, Winyard searched each pool and corner for the feeding fish ; and already the weight of his creel was of some consideration upon his back, with every now and then a thrill of life as some brave trout gave his last convulsive kick.

Presently Adonis, who, having conceived the idea that there might be water-rats about, had turned his attention to the river's edge, looked up and broke the silence.

‘Woff!’ he said—an internal interlabial bark, the sound of which appeared to strike the gleaming barricade of teeth, and travel down again to the inward parts of his muscular person.

‘I beg your pardon,’ observed his master absently, being at that moment absorbed in the deft placing of his flies beneath an overhanging branch across the stream.

‘Woff!’ repeated Adonis, showing all his ribs with a sudden drawing-in of breath.

‘Indeed!’ said Winyard with kindly interest, and following the direction of the dog’s eyes, he saw the cause of his annoyance.

This was the form of a young artist, who, seated upon a humble camp-stool, was transferring to his tiny paper a very pretty glimpse of the Broomwater.

As the fisherman passed, the artist slightly raised his hat with foreign politeness, which salutation was immediately returned, and

Mistley continued on his way. When he had passed out of sight the artist promptly rose from his seat, and packed his materials away into a portfolio.

‘He does not remember me—assuredly!’ he murmured in Russian, as he turned and walked rapidly down-stream towards Walso. But in this Ivan Meyer was mistaken.





CHAPTER XI.

WINYARD reached Broomhaugh before the Colonel, and as he climbed the narrow stone steps cut in the solid wall, he saw Lena on the terrace. She was sitting reading in the corner whence the view of Mistley's Gap was obtainable.

‘Back already!’ she said, looking up with a smile.

‘Yes,’ he said slowly. ‘Back already.’

He seated himself on the low wall beside her, and swinging his creel round, he opened it for her inspection.

Mrs. Wright happened to be in her bedroom, and from the window she could see these two young folks. She had no desire to watch their movements—no wish to spy upon anyone—but she could not help noting that the two young heads were very close together over the open basket ; it almost seemed as if Lena's soft dry hair were touching Winyard's lips.

‘I wish,’ whispered Mrs. Wright, as she turned away from the window—‘I wish I knew what to do. I wish Laurance Lowe were here—he knows Lena better than anyone ; and Willy is enjoying his stay here so much, that I do not like to trouble him with my misgivings.’

In the meantime Winyard had closed the creel, and having laid it down in a shady corner, he returned and sat down beside Lena again. The water was slowly dripping from his waders, forming two little pools upon the stone pavement. With his foot

Winyard gravely constructed a little canal connecting these two pools, while Lena watched him in silence. Presently, without looking up, he said :

‘ I must write to Charlie to-day about the theatricals—what am I to say, Miss Wright?’

His eyes were quite grave, but his lips were twitching with suppressed laughter as he gravely awaited her reply.

‘ You are to say, Mr. Mistley . . .’

‘ Excuse me, you appear to find a little difficulty in saying Mr. Mistley,’ he interrupted. ‘ It is awkward, I know—people have remarked upon it often. Mistley is one of those names with which “Mr.” goes badly. You will find “Winyard” much easier to say I think!’

‘ You are to say,’ continued Lena, carefully omitting any name whatever, ‘ that Miss Sandford will take the heroine’s part, and that I will have much pleasure in doing my best as the sprightly widow.’

‘ And that I will commence at once to study the part of the domestic servant who comes in once and says : “ The carriage is at the door.” ’

‘ No—we settled that you should take the principal part.’

‘ *You* did.’

‘ Yes !’ said Lena, with a decisive nod.

‘ And I settled that you should be the heroine,’ observed Winyard meekly.

‘ But I cannot act it.’

‘ Why ?’

‘ Because there is too much pathos in it, and I cannot do pathos ; it is not in my nature, I am afraid.’

‘ You forget,’ said Mistley, ‘ that I have heard you sing.’

‘ Oh, that is a mere matter of tuition !’

Winyard slowly shook his head. ‘ You never learnt to sing that song as you sang it the evening I listened behind you in the hall.’

Lena shrugged her shoulders and laughed. 'Tuition,' she said again.

'Then,' said Winyard, turning towards her suddenly, 'let me be your tutor. If you would act that part, I know we could make it a success. With Mabel Sandford I simply could not do it ; she has no conception of the character, and would spoil it. When you see her, you will acknowledge that I am right. She is very nice of course, but absolutely without the least power or individuality. If she had only remained in the country she would have been all right ; but two seasons in town with a scheming old aunt have, according to all accounts, completely spoilt her !'

'Do you think that your arrangement will suit Charlie ?' asked Lena.

'I am certain of it. In fact, it is not my arrangement, but his. He maintains that he could not take a larger *rôle* and be stage-manager as well ; and we must have him as

manager, because no one else can do it so well.'

At last Lena consented, on condition that it should not be mentioned until after she had made Mabel Sandford's acquaintance ; and with this Winyard was forced to be content.

While they were still talking over this matter, the Colonel arrived with a very heavy basket of fish, and a separate tale to tell of each individual captive of his rod.

It was nearly three o'clock before they were mounted and on the road to Sandoe ; and as they rode along, the Colonel continued to regale the two young people with his experiences during the morning.

Presently, however, they left the road and turned into a narrow lane, Lena leading, the Colonel next, and Mistley last. Winyard was quite convinced in his own mind that there was ample room between the hedges

for two to ride abreast, but Lena kept in the centre pathway, and the Colonel squarely followed.

Such lanes are common enough about Walso. A mere strip of grass between two hedges, worn, like you and me, in proportion to the traffic passing over them, and to the friction of wind and weather. Some have only one worn track, and that but shallow, like the late wrinkle on a smooth face ; and again, some have as many as three rugged furrows, like the lines on a scantily thatched head, which has remained stationary while others passed over it.

The Sandoe road, however, was well-to-do and of evident prosperity and luxuriance. At the foot of either hedge the nettle and gentle dock grew together in harmony ; while overhead the wanton briar-roses, not content with the place assigned to them, spread long, pliant arms, and carried the sweet beauty of their bloom into other folks' quarters ; notably of

the blackthorn and pithy elder, both of which, from jealousy no doubt, grew crookedly, with twist and ugly knot. In and out and everywhere, the stealthy woodbine crept upwards with innocent trailing tendril, content to be little seen below, knowing well that overhead, outstripping every other growth, its redeeming flower was fairest of all, diffusing the sweetest breath into the air.

Winyard's horse was young and unsteady, consequently he had but little time to admire the scenery ; also he appeared to prefer for contemplative purposes, when his animal allowed of such, a slim and graceful figure slightly swaying to the movements of a sleek little mare in front. At length the lane was brought to a sudden termination, as is the fate of all such lanes, by a high-road running at right angles to it.

The Sandfords were simple people of a North-country type, now, alas ! growing rare. Already ' Old Sandford,' as he was uni-

versally called, was beginning to find that his daughter had imported all sorts of new-fangled ideas from her South-country boarding school, that the old home was too simple for her enlightened tastes, and that even his own little personal habits jarred upon her sensitive nerves.

His forefathers, he opined, had always been content to live in Sandoe, though Mabel complained that it was a common farmhouse. They had always found the prospect of hills and low-lying meadow sufficient for their eyes, and the knowledge that it was all Sandoe land was happiness enough for their quiet hearts.

The house was, indeed, little else than an enlarged copy of the solid farmsteads of the neighbourhood; but the Sandfords were not farmers, and never had been, though why folks should be ashamed of an honourable occupation Old Sandford could not understand. Born, bred, and now growing old

amidst the solemnity of his beloved hills, where all goes slowly and surely except the clouds overhead—and God's hand guides them, so their speed need alarm no one—the old fellow was himself a slow man, but very sure. Above all he was a gentleman by heart and by head as well, though he had never been farther South than Morpeth for his education.

When the Broomhaugh party entered the roomy, old-fashioned hall, which was used as a sitting-room at Sandoe, they found Old Sandford stamping his feet after a long ride.

‘Ah, Win, my boy!’ he exclaimed. ‘Thank God we’ve got you back to the North country again!’

Then followed the introductions, and the old gentleman shook hands heartily with Lena and her father, for he had no faith in those new-fangled bows with which strangers honour each other nowadays when they are supposed to be strangers no longer.

‘Glad to meet you, sir!’ he said to the Colonel in his quick abrupt manner, with an expressive jerk of the head, which seemed to say : ‘I may be an old country bumpkin, but I know all about *you*!’

Then he proposed an adjournment to the summer-house, where they would no doubt find Mabel. ‘Reading novels, I expect!’ he added, with a glance towards Winyard.

Mabel Sandford was indeed there, and moreover she laid aside a yellow-backed book as she rose to meet them. Winyard she greeted with an effusion which he, at least, thought rather overdone. She was dressed too well for the occasion, and her bright black hair was arranged somewhat more elaborately than was necessary. Nevertheless she was decidedly pretty, with large dark eyes of the type usually called ‘fine,’ and a graceful figure full of lithe strength.

Leaving the two old gentlemen to amuse

each other, Winyard began the question of the theatricals at once.

‘Charlie is stage-manager,’ he said, ‘but he asked me to get things on as far as possible before he came, because we have no time to waste—he goes to the Mediterranean next month, and I may be called away at any time.’

‘It is a shame,’ exclaimed Mabel Sandford, with an exaggerated pout of her full red lips, ‘the way in which we poor females are deserted by everyone! I have not seen Charlie for months; and as for you, Win, I am surprised to see you now!’

‘I expect,’ replied Winyard, with rather a short laugh, ‘that you will be heartily tired of us both before these theatricals come. You have read through the piece, of course.’

‘Oh—yes!’ replied Miss Sandford. She had just picked a little spray of monthly roses, and was fixing it in her dress, glancing occasionally at Mistley as she did so.

‘Well, we want you to undertake the longest part!’

‘The heroine?’

‘No, the young widow; there is a great deal to learn, mind,’ replied Winyard innocently, carefully avoiding Lena’s eyes, and meeting Mabel’s with infinite audacity.

‘If you think I can do it, I am quite willing.’

‘Oh—I am certain of it! Miss Wright will play the heroine, Charlie the hero, and I the villain. Walter says he will act the old man’s part, does he not?’

‘Yes; by-the-bye, he is somewhere in the garden. I will go and call him.’

Mabel Sandford was a little disappointed, but she had too much spirit to show it; and Winyard’s great interest in her part, displayed in the subsequent rehearsals, at length convinced her that although she was not the heroine of the piece, her part was by no means unimportant. Her brother, who presently

appeared, was a simple good-natured fellow two years younger than herself. He openly confessed to being in a 'mortal fright' about appearing on the stage; but expressed a humble readiness to do his best.

Winyard Mistley was not in the habit of allowing the grass to grow beneath his feet. Without appearing to have or even desire his own way, and by means of gentle suggestions, he arranged all the preliminaries, and even fixed the day for the first rehearsal before leaving Sandoe that evening.

Heavy clouds had been stealing up over the hills for some hours, and, as the gate swung to behind the Colonel's horse, large sullen drops began to fall into the dusty road.

The Colonel led the way down the green lane, keeping up a steady trot despite the roughness of the path. At last the rain began in earnest, and he pulled up to suggest that Lena should put on the jacket she had strapped to her saddle.

‘ You two light-weights can soon catch me up,’ he said, riding off.

Lena stopped in the middle of the lane, and proceeded to endeavour, unaided, to loosen the straps round her jacket ; but her gloves were wet, and the slippery leather refused to submit. Then Mistley forced his horse into the ditch, and so reached her side.

‘ I have no gloves on,’ he said quietly, as he leant over and took possession of the straps.

‘ Thank you,’ said she, looking rather anxiously after her retreating parent.

In a moment Winyard had unbuckled the straps and shaken out the short thick jacket. Then he took her bridle in his disengaged hand, and so left her free. But fortune was against her ; the collar of the jacket got turned in, and Mistley had to take both reins in one hand while he leant back and assisted her. When he had done this, and Lena had secured the last button, she held out her hand

for the reins ; but he retained them for a moment longer.

‘ Am I forgiven ? ’ he asked.

‘ For what ? ’ Lena looked rather markedly up at the sky, as if in gentle protest against being detained in the rain.

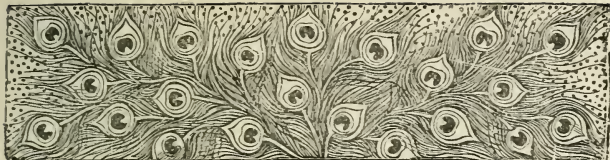
‘ For having my own way. ’

‘ Oh—I do not mind acting the part, ’ she replied with a short laugh.

It is in little incidents—in the trivialities of everyday life—that a man shows his knowledge of human nature. Winyard now suddenly abandoned the subject, and drew aside to let Lena pass.

‘ And now for a scamper home ! ’ he exclaimed cheerily, as the horses sprang forward at a long canter.





CHAPTER XII.

THE following evening Charles Mistleley arrived. This event, unimportant though it may appear, had been awaited with some dread by Mrs. Wright ; indeed, perhaps Mrs. Mistleley herself may have had some misgivings on the matter, though she betrayed no signs of such.

The former lady, however, was by no means happy on the subject of her daughter. Of course it was natural, she confessed to herself, that the two young people should seek each other's society in a household composed of an older generation ; and this great friendship (if such it was) might have been expected

under the circumstances. But an equally close friendship had existed between Charlie and Lena before Winyard appeared on the scene; and the remembrance of this was not pleasant to the cheery little lady's soul. To her, Lena was a puzzle, as, indeed, she was to a great many people. No subject had hitherto been quite sacred from the girl's raillery; life had, up to the present time, been a very pleasant affair—mostly laughter, and with no sorrows too serious to be laughed at later on. But now this unwearying mother thought she detected a graver look in Lena's eyes, and, mother-like, she set to work to find out what this shadow could portend. Mrs. Wright loved to look on love, as all good women do; but she had lived long enough in the world to know that where there is a victory there must be a vanquished, and the old foreboding came back to her that there was danger for Lena in this visit to Broomhaugh.

In fact, this little lady was puzzling over

a question which has never been answered yet. This was the possibility of a true friendship existing between a maiden and a youth. It is very easy to give an opinion upon it in a general way, and many of us consider ourselves perfectly qualified to do so ; but during life we will have to alter that opinion several times. This peculiarity, however, is common to every generality, because in speaking generally we invariably think individually. We boldly apply generalities to the entire human race, or to one-half of it, without deigning to inquire from whence the inspiration has been drawn ; and on investigation it usually transpires that the opinion applies to one individual only. Indeed, it cannot well be otherwise, as there are no two human lives alike, and, in consequence, no two natures identical. This habit of speaking collectively is usually a youthful fault, which vanishes as experience wears out the bristles of our mental broom. When we

are young, and the bristles are all astir with self-opiniated and mistaken zeal, we make great broad sweeps around us, collecting—like other new brooms—a little dust, and leaving unsightly streaks behind us, which only serve to show where the dust lies thickest ; but when the bristles are worn down a little we go to work more carefully, not in broad sweeps, but in little sidelong movements, clearing no great space, but leaving no streaks behind us.

Mrs. Wright had, like most people, her ideas upon this doubtful friendship, though she was too wise to hazard a decided opinion upon the matter. Like many of her sex, she knew men better than women, and having attained a certain age, was capable of judging them impartially. In fact, she saw the gingerbread without that guilt which is so apt to dazzle younger eyes. It is a lamentable fact that there is remarkably little guilt or gleam of any true metal about young men, until

they have acquired it from contact with finer wares. The result of Mrs. Wright's observations—which may be worth recording—was, that the man is to blame in almost every case of a spoilt friendship ; that most girls are capable of forming a friendship with a youthful member of the sterner sex, but that the vanity of the latter invariably spoils it, and renders its existence an impossibility. He, in fact, in his superb self-appreciation, cannot realize that a girl may show a liking for his society without being in love with him, which, after all, he thinks is the most natural thing in the world.

Now Mrs. Wright had, in a few days, formed a much more correct estimate of Winyard Mistley's feelings than that astute young gentleman suspected. She knew his to be a heart wherein ambition had found its place before love. It is so in some cases, and when love arrives, he finds himself in the position of a dog who comes home to dis-

cover his kennel occupied by a determined and resolute cat. Some dogs—such characters as our friend Adonis—will make a rush at the kennel, and probably, at the expense of a few scratches, accompanied by much vituperation, will turn the cat out. Others will be more wary, and their tactics will perhaps partake more of the orthodox method of warfare : result—scratches galore, and the intruder still in possession. Others, again, will feign to be ignorant of the intrusion, professing a great interest in various objects of refuse that may be lying around, taking care at the same time to turn an unobservant back upon the kennel, and thus afford the cat an opportunity of honourable escape.

Mrs. Wright shrewdly suspected that the intruder, ambition, was in possession of Windyard Mistley's heart ; but, womanlike, she promptly thought it possible that the sad dog, love, might be prowling round in search of his own rights ; and her instinct told her

that the plan of assault most to be feared was the Adonis-like attack, sudden and daring.

During the last two years, Lena's mother had thought a good deal upon the subject of young men in general, and Charles Mistley in particular. The more she saw of that grave young sailor, the stronger grew her liking for him. She soon learnt that his gravity by no means denoted a dulness of intellect, and discovered each day some new proof of his thoughtfulness for others and forgetfulness of self—qualities which find greater favour with elderly than with young ladies. Gradually she had dropped into the habit of encouraging the friendship which had sprung up between him and Lena, reflecting that if it grew into something stronger than friendship, Charles Mistley was worthy of any woman's love. There was, however, that grim fact of his being a sailor, which was for ever forcing itself upon her notice, and would

not be permanently quelled by the reflection that there are many appointments on shore within reach of sailors who, like Charles Mistley, have a moderate income and a certain influence at headquarters.

The younger brother, Winyard, had never entered into Mrs. Wright's thoughts in the matter, and lo ! here he was, barely a fortnight at home, complicating things most terribly by calmly establishing a friendship remarkably like that which had caused so much uneasiness already. Whatever the result might be, this shrewd little woman of the world knew that no good could come of it ; she held the opinion that the influence of a young woman over a young man can be of no earthly good to him. Altogether, Mrs. Wright had no desire to witness the experiment between her daughter and either of the Mistleys. It is a dangerous experiment and a desperately unprofitable one, O youthful inquirer—an experiment best left

alone, as the writer of these poor lines can testify, having burnt his fingers over it !

In the meantime, Winyard and Lena seemed to be cheerfully progressing down that flowery path which is so lovely at first sight, so disappointing on nearer inspection, and so exceedingly thorny as one penetrates into its depths.

They drove into Walso together to meet Charlie, and all three arrived in the highest good-humour with themselves and everyone else, as the first dinner-bell pealed through the house.

Despite her cheerfulness, however, Lena was a little thoughtful at intervals that evening, and during the mystic arrangement of her hair she was so absorbed that she not only forgot to hum a ditty to herself, but she displayed a most unusual awkwardness in the insertion of sundry pins, more or less calculated to keep her head in order, and consequently the entire erection presented,

even more than was customary, an appearance of approaching collapse.

A second attempt, however, was eminently satisfactory, and she tripped downstairs, a demure and fairy-form, long before the second bell rang. With maidenly dignity she entered the drawing-room, cool and serene, as if there were no such thing as dressing in fifteen minutes ; but it was only to find Winyard standing at the open window, cooler and more serene, as if there were no such thing as reducing fifteen to ten. He did not speak, but held back the soft curtain for her to pass out into the garden.

‘Not on the grass,’ he said with paternal anxiety, as he followed her, ‘your shoes are too thin!’ And she obediently walked on the gravel.

‘Will you be so kind as to wear that dress in the third act?’ asked Winyard presently.

‘Why?’

‘Because . . . oh, because it is the most difficult scene, and I think I could do it better if you wore that particular dress. Do you understand?’

‘Hardly . . .’ replied Lena truthfully. She was trying hard to find out whether he was serious or not. ‘But still, if there is stimulation in it to do great things, I suppose I must wear it; but I do not think it will be quite appropriate to the scene.’

‘Why not?’

‘Well, that is just the most pathetic part of the whole play, which is in itself by no means cheerful; and white with a yellow sash is not exactly pathetic!’

‘Tell me,’ said Winyard, with exaggerated gravity, ‘why white with a yellow sash is not pathetic.’

‘I do not know,’ she replied with a laugh, ‘but that is my view of the case.’

‘But do you not think that a strong contrast is always effective? I have never yet

understood why people on the stage should persist in dressing in sombre garb on account of the sorrow that is coming, and of which they are supposed to know nothing. The most touching thing I ever saw on the stage was at the Comédie Française years ago, when I was at school at Fontainebleau. It made such an impression on me, that I have never forgotten it. The heroine was in a ball-dress, and the hero in ordinary evening clothes, with a decoration in his button-hole. It sounds prosaic, but it was wonderfully effective. The saddest things that have happened on earth have been in the gayest towns, within the very sound of music and laughter.'

'Then you think I ought to be gay until the last minute!'

'I think so, certainly. It is a principle which one can safely go upon until the end of the chapter, and never regret it. Talleyrand originated that idea, I believe. I am

quite certain that half of our troubles are only worthy to be met with laughter.'

'Do you speak from experience?' asked Lena, thinking of her father's description of Winyard Mistley's dauntless spirits.

'No, because I have had little or nothing to experiment upon, having always been a lucky individual; but I cannot help admiring people who can laugh when they do not feel like it.'

'What a prosaic way of putting it!'

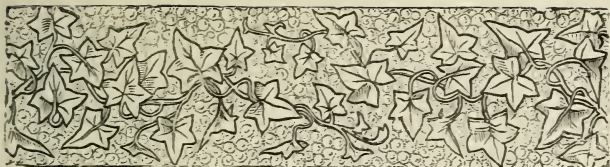
'Perhaps so—but you know what I mean, nevertheless. Now, if you were to wear that dress, I am sure it would prove most effective. There is something about a white dress—a soft, simple sort of dress like yours—with a yellow sash, which always makes me feel most sentimental; and I am certain that such a result could not fail to be edifying to every onlooker. If you were to add some flowers it would be still better—say jasmine. We will try the effect to-night.'

And he stopped to gather a few sweet-smelling sprays, which somehow took so long to arrange satisfactorily that the bell had to be rung again for their special benefit before they obeyed it.

‘We will consult the stage-manager about it,’ said Mistley, as they turned towards the house.

‘No!’ she said quickly. ‘Please do not do that!’





CHAPTER XIII.

AT breakfast next morning, Colonel Wright explained at some length that as the stage-manager had now arrived, he failed to see any obstacle in the way of Winyard and himself indulging in another morning's fishing. This proposal Winyard agreed to with his usual readiness, and immediately after the morning meal they sallied forth together.

According to arrangement, Winyard went down-stream again, while the Colonel fished up. It was not really a good day for sport. The sky was brilliant, with dazzling white clouds scudding before a strong breeze.

Altogether, matters did not go well. Several times Winyard stumbled as he made his way up the bed of the stream, very nearly breaking his rod on each occasion. Before he had been at work half an hour, he caught his fly twice in a tree, having to cross through deep water to release it. In fact, he was fishing atrociously. Now, when a man who is an adept with the rod fails to catch fish, and occasionally hooks a tree, it is fairly safe to surmise that he is not giving his mind to the work before him. Such, indeed, it is to be feared was the case with this cheerful young fisherman.

The strong will of a strong man is a tough antagonist for the best of us—that is to say, for the best of women, who are superior to us in matters wherein endurance counts heavily. Under a happy and careless manner, Winyard Mistley concealed a certain dogged determination, and all this was now centred on the profession which he had

adopted. Ambition, determination, and patriotism fought together in the young man's heart—a strong combination under a resolute leader, for ambition has led men upwards to the highest pinnacles of fame, despite every obstacle. Pitted against these allies was one small foe, his only arm a bow and arrow of the frailest workmanship. But he knew no fear, for he had fought the miscreants before, and vanquished them. In his plucky little heart was the knowledge that those three restless giants (one of whom he loves as a brother) are but mortal, whereas he is a god. He can lurk within the inmost citadel unseen, unsuspected ; sometimes, even, he is content to lie hidden until the battle is over, and he laughingly appears with cynicism curling on his rosy lips.

To Winyard Mistley, Ambition and his allies whispered : ‘ Leave home and love, cast aside comfort and ease, sacrifice all in order to pierce through the ruck of medioc-

rity—and pierce you must !’ On the other hand, a small voice urged : ‘ I am worth more than fame, more than glory and a country’s gratitude, for I outlive them all !’

No wonder this angler caught trees instead of fish, when such inward voices were striving for the mastery. But the strife was destined to be settled by an event, and not by thoughts. It is ever so in our lives—we think great huge thoughts, and, like the waves of the sea, they roll on and are no more, while a tiny event may make a great man greater, and a poor man greatest. We often wonder, in profitless moments of self-study, how we would act in a crisis ; imagining the while that the crises of our lives are ushered in with due regard to stage-effect, whereas they are in and out again before we realize it. It is only in looking back that we find the true turning-point, as a man having lost his way goes mentally back over the road to discover where his mistake occurred.

While he fished, Winyard Mistley was actually pondering over the advisability of abandoning his new profession. What conclusion he might have arrived at it were hard to say had he been allowed to think the matter out ; but suddenly a new light shone upon it. A light all lurid with the hate of man, red with the gleam of aggressive treachery, yet shining with the glory of a steadfast purpose.

Amid the solitary grandeur of his native hills, by the side of peaceful Broomwater, an event was destined to take place on this fair summer morning which left its mark on Winyard Mistley's life. It was here that the long pursuit, so steadfastly carried out by Marie Bakovitch, was to come to an end. As will be learnt hereafter, he was fully aware of the girl's purpose, and even knew her name and description ; but had always treated the matter lightly, as the passing freak of a highly strung and ignorant girl. Now he was about

to learn his mistake ; he was about to face a sudden and unexpected danger, alone and unaided, as he had faced most things in his short life. And the result of it all was to be the appearance of a new ally against the little god who had laid his siege so skilfully. Dogged British pride joined ambition, determination, and patriotism, and drove their small enemy shrinking back.

Winyard Mistley had made his uneventful way up the stream for about a mile, and was now approaching a spot where the water broadened out, losing, after the manner of earthly things, profundity in so doing. Here were stepping-stones, and on each side a natural unmade footpath.

Although he was fishing carelessly, Winyard's eyes were fixed upon the water ; and he therefore failed to perceive the form of a girl at the edge of the stream, upon the opposite side, and a little higher up.

This young lady had apparently no inten-

tion of making her way across the stepping-stones, being quite content to stay where she was. Every now and then she glanced downstream, as if expecting some one; and yet when Mistley appeared, unconsciously and placidly angling, she appeared surprised and somewhat disturbed. At first she made a movement as if to draw back; and then, suddenly stepping forward, she resolutely planted herself at the water's edge, with pale agitated face and quivering lips, while her small ungloved hand went to the pocket of her dress.

Adonis was some distance behind his master, engaged in botanical discoveries, and therefore oblivious to all around him. With aggravating deliberation the fisherman came slowly on. The water below the stepping-stones was of no use to him, so he raised his rod to gather in the line and pass on. As he did so he lifted his eyes, and found himself face to face with the girl. Her attitude, the paleness of her lovely face, and the wild ex-

citement gleaming in her eyes were instantly observed by Winyard; and in a flash of thought he connected her presence there with himself, and with the tall artist whose face he remembered having seen at Victoria Station on the morning of his arrival in England.

There was no ignoring the girl's evident excitement; he could not pretend to treat her as a villager, and pass on with a local greeting. For a moment the ruddy colour left his face; but it was not due to cowardice, for men grow pale in moments of excitement who do not know what fear is. Then he raised his cap, but never smiled or inclined his head.

The girl ignored his salutation, standing motionless and pale as a marble statue.

‘I am Marie Bakovitch,’ she said simply, the musical tone of her deep voice rising above the brawl of water.

‘I know it,’ he replied. Even in face of

her pale, set features, and under the gaze of her cold blue eyes he could not check the quiver of his lips. He was too chivalrous to let her see his smile, so he said : ‘ You have caught me at last !’

Then, rod in hand, he stepped into the running water, while Adonis stood upon the bank with his left ear raised, watching these proceedings uneasily. The brook sped past Winyard’s legs, rippling and laughing, while with its voice mingled the sad murmur of the pine-trees overhead, like the sound of the surf on a deserted shore.

Slowly he made his way across, feeling with his encumbered feet for each standing-place, for he dared not remove his eyes from the girl’s pale and defiant face. Suddenly she seemed to realize what he was doing, and she raised one hand convulsively to her throbbing temples. Then hastily she withdrew the other hand from her pocket. Mistley saw the gleam of polished metal flashing

in the sunlight, and a moment later he was facing the muzzle of a pistol, while behind it he still met those lifeless blue eyes fixed on his face, with no light of hatred in them.

The sight of the little black orifice, with its rim of blue steel, drove the smile away from the young Englishman's lips ; but still he slowly approached her with the dogged coolness of his race—not blindly, but calculating his chances as if he were gifted with a dozen lives.

‘If,’ she exclaimed, in her pretty Russianized English, ‘you come one step nearer to me, I kill you !’

No reply came from his lips. The stream laughed on. Overhead the pine-trees sighed, and far away in the blue ether a solitary curlew gave forth his weird cry of warning.

Facing the mouth of the grim little pistol, Winyard never hesitated. He was half-way across the stream, and with the same sure-footedness he continued his way.

Then suddenly the girl dropped her arm.

‘For God’s sake, *stop!*’ she hissed, stamping her foot on the soft turf.

Still he came on towards her, with steadfast gray eyes fixed on her face. Then she slowly raised her arm again, and turned the pistol towards him. While facing it, he was calculating his chances with a deliberation that was surprising even to himself; and there flitted through his mind the recollection of his own failure to shoot a disabled horse, because its eyes met his without flinching.

The bed of the stream was now rising at a gentle incline beneath his feet; a few more steps, and he would be in shallower water; yet another few, and that small white hand would be within his reach.

Suddenly a streak of white flame almost blinded him, and a ringing report well-nigh burst his brain.

The little puff of gray smoke rose slowly

on the breeze, and Marie Bakovitch saw Mistley standing in the shallow water.

‘Pah!’ he exclaimed, as he passed his disengaged hand across his eyes.

The sulphureous smoke had half choked him, and some grains of unburnt powder had flown into his face, causing a momentary sting; otherwise, he was unhurt. The pistol was of German manufacture, and threw high, having been made (as might have been expected) to sell, and not to shoot with.

He gave her no time to attempt a second shot. In an instant he was on the bank, having sent his rod quivering on to the turf beside him.

He grasped her wrist, but not too fiercely, for even then he remembered his manners, and the wrist was very small and shapely.

She made no attempt to resist, and relinquished her hold on the weapon as he firmly took it. Suddenly he felt the life go from her hand, and was just in time to catch

her as she fell, unconscious and helpless, forwards into his arms. It took him a moment to realize what had happened ; then he laid her gently on the slope of the bank, and turned to get some water, which element he supposed to be necessary under the circumstances.

Across the stream Adonis, with all his sportive instincts aroused by the sound of a firearm, was hunting eagerly, with ears erect and officious tail, for the slaughtered game.

‘ Adonis,’ said Winyard, with comic vexation, ‘ you’re an idiot !’

A man is not seen to advantage when administering aid to an unconscious woman. He is apt to be clumsy and ridiculously awkward, feeling all the while that this is no fit occupation for him, that he is meddling with a delicate machine of which the sensitive workmanship and motive-springs are to him a profound mystery. He is oppressed with the notion that another woman would in-

stantly put matters right by the simple means of unhooking something, or the performance of some similar trivial office of which he knows absolutely nothing, and would rather not attempt in view of returning consciousness. With a sufferer of his own sex, it is a different matter ; and from the time of the good Samaritan down to these ambulance-days, a man ministering to a man has always been an edifying and wholesome picture.

However, it was Winyard Mistley's custom to make the best of most things. There was within him that true British conceit which prides itself upon being equal to every emergency, provided it be human, and the cause more or less a righteous one. Therefore he filled his cap with the cool water that flowed from the Northern hills, and set about to vanquish this unknown foe.

Now it happened that sunstroke was a visitation with which he was more or less

familiar, having had experience of it on several occasions ; moreover, he was a great partaker in a certain insular love of cold water applied outwardly, and it appeared to him that he might do worse than treat this fair patient as he had treated many (less attractive) suffering from sunstroke.

Carefully holding his cap by the rim, he suddenly tipped it over, and cast upon the girl's lifeless face a cold shock of water, which immediately trickled down her graceful neck in a most uncomfortable manner. But what man, under the circumstances, could have been expected to think of that ? This vigorous treatment met with its due reward, for Marie Bakovitch promptly opened her eyes, just in time to save herself the infliction of a second capful.

‘ Where am I ? ’ she inquired in French, that being the tongue in which she prayed and thought, having spoken it before any other.

Winyard was never averse to satisfying

harmless curiosity ; but to answer this question was a matter of some length, so he ignored it, and said in the same language :

‘ Now you are all right again, is it not so ? Come, let us sit on that great stone. There you will get the breeze.’

He slid an arm under the light form of his would-be murderess, and gently supported her towards the rock indicated. She allowed herself to be placed thereon in dazed silence, and then slowly raised one hand to the bosom of her dress.

‘ I am afraid you are rather damp,’ said Winyard apologetically, but with a cheerfulness of manner which seemed to indicate that all had occurred for the best. Then, being a gentleman and perhaps a little soft-hearted, he turned away, busying himself with the top of his flask. This gave the girl time to re-arrange the soft masses of hair which had become a little loosened, and to give one or two little cunning touches to her apparel,

which a woman with only half her senses will still do.

‘Here,’ he said, holding forth the cup of his flask, ‘take a little drink of that.’

Obediently she took the metal cup and drank. If only Ivan Meyer could have seen how Winyard commanded and Marie obeyed, he might have learned therefrom an invaluable lesson, for the girl was of those who need to be domineered over, and are happiest in obedience. What Ivan Meyer the thoughtful failed to perceive in length and fulness of years, Winyard Mistley the superficial saw in exactly two minutes, and knew how to profit from it. The cordial appeared to revive her ; a reawakening of life dawned in her eyes, and a faint pink, like the sunny side of a peach, rose to her cheeks.

‘Did I faint?’ she asked, without looking up ; indeed, her eyes were fixed on the cup she still held, the contents of which were evidently not to her taste.

‘Yes ; but you are all right again now,’ was the cheerful and inspiring reply.

Then she looked up, and appeared to recognise him for the first time, for she started back, exclaiming, ‘Oh—oh-h-h!’ and covered her face with her hands, as if in horror of a recollection just rising in her brain.





CHAPTER XIV.

WINYARD MISTLEY watched her in silence. He almost expected some hysterical display, or perhaps a vain onslaught upon himself. The colour slowly left her face, and her level red lips were pressed together painfully.

‘Now do not go and upset yourself!’ he said masterfully, as he picked up the cup she had cast from her. ‘Let us be business-like and quiet. Do you feel better now? Is there anything I can do for you?’

She looked up at him in vague amazement. Then pressing back her hair with both hands, she said :

‘ I cannot understand you Englishmen . . . do you know who I am ?’

‘ Oh yes, mademoiselle,’ he replied ; ‘ I know who you are !’

He stooped and picked up the revolver which had so lately been pointed at him, and Marie Bakovitch watched in silence while he dexterously removed the five remaining cartridges and threw them into the stream, much to the astonishment of Adonis. Then he politely handed her the firearm.

‘ I have a favour to ask of you, mademoiselle,’ he said, ‘ and then, if you feel restored, I will leave you.’

‘ Of me ?’ The poor girl was piteously pale, but showed no sign of womanly tearfulness or emotion.

‘ Yes,’ he replied, stepping nearer. ‘ Will you tell me whether you were sent by your Government or not ?’

‘ I was not.’

‘ And yet,’ said Mistley, watching her face

closely, ‘your Government knew of your purpose. They placed every facility in your reach ; they encouraged you as much as they *dared* . . .’

She winced as he emphasized the last words. She sat twining and intertwining her ungloved fingers, but never spoke.

‘They,’ he continued bitterly, ‘found themselves outwitted by simple straightforwardness, which, because it was not their mode of acting, was not expected by them. What they failed to do by telling lies, breaking treaties, and ignoring the commonest points of honour, they attempted to accomplish by foul means, calling in the aid of a woman . . . of a *lady*, mademoiselle, whose hands should never have been soiled by such dirty work. I shall never cease to regret that this has occurred, and I need hardly tell you that the matter will rest between ourselves, with the exception of Colonel Wright, who must be informed of it, not as a personal matter, but

as a question of policy. To yourself personally, I bear not the slightest malice ; but oblige me by telling the man who signed your passport, who gave orders to the spy Marloff to watch me and report to you, who, in fact, did his best to make you a murderess—tell him that from henceforth I work no longer from a sense of duty to my country, but from feelings of the fiercest hatred towards himself and his despicable agents. Ah ! you need not look frightened. In England we say what we mean, and are not afraid of treacherous ears being ever on the *qui vive* to report every compromising word uttered in confidence.'

He was roused at last, and the gray eyes, hitherto so calm and restful, flashed as only gray eyes can.

The girl rose and faced him bravely ; although of a singularly *fébrile* and nervous temperament, she felt at that moment no bodily fear.

‘It is for my country that I strive, and not for any man,’ she said in a low, concentrated tone which was wonderfully musical. ‘I, too, am a patriot. I, too, love my home, and count my life as nothing beside my country’s good. You have power, and you are a man whose words are listened to ; but for me it is a different matter. I am powerless, and can never hope to raise myself to a position of power. My life is of no value to Russia ; but by losing it I could make it of value, if, by that sacrifice, I could remove from her path an enemy as implacable, as influential as yourself.’

It is painful to have to record the fact that Winyard Mistley shrugged his shoulders at these words. Such patriotism as shows itself in the forming of societies and making of fiery speeches was particularly distasteful to him. Indeed, it was by his extreme reticence that he made his mark in the diplomatic world. He had shrewdly sus-

pected that Marie Bakovitch was the victim of unscrupulous men, who, possessing a certain gift of hysteric oratory, urged on others to deeds of violence, while religiously avoiding all danger to their own persons. This suspicion he now found confirmed by the girl's speech.

Perceiving that Winyard Mistley had no intention of being dragged into an argument, and was indeed preparing to leave her, Marie suddenly changed her manner.

‘I, too, have a favour to ask of you,’ she almost pleaded. ‘I am in your power, wholly and inevitably; but as an English gentleman I beg of you to keep . . . this matter . . . a profound secret from Ivan Meyer. I am strong again now . . . I will go!’

With a grave inclination of the head she passed him, stepping firmly on the dry turf. He watched her as she made her way along the edge of the stream by the little path

that led to Walso. Adonis having gravely undertaken a search on his own account for the five cartridges thrown into the river, now returned unsuccessful, and took his stand by his master's side, with sturdy legs set well apart for greater convenience of the draining water. He also watched the maiden depart, turning occasional glances towards his master's face with a brisk and questioning movement, as if to ask what this was all about.

Winyard was in the habit of taking life cheerfully, seeking out the sunny side of every cloud, but now he was exceptionally grave. It was characteristic of his somewhat reckless ancestors that he gave no thought to the danger he had just passed through.

‘Poor girl!’ he muttered; ‘she is desperately in earnest, and consequently she is miserable!’

Then he suddenly stooped to pick up his rod.

‘Adonis,’ he said; ‘Adonis—I wonder who Ivan Meyer can be. He does not know that she was waiting here for me to-day. There is more in that than meets the eye!’

Adonis placed his head slightly on one side, at the same time elevating one ear, a habit he had when puzzled. He also had his thoughts upon all this, but, alas! he could not speak them.

When Winyard reached Broomhaugh with rather a poor basket of fish upon his back, he was told that Colonel Wright had also returned and was changing his fishing-clothes. When he came downstairs a few minutes later, he found his chief waiting for him at the door of a little smoking-room which was specially set apart for the gentlemen.

The old fellow looked grave, and, ignoring Winyard’s inquiry as to what sport he had had, he motioned him to enter the room, and followed closely. Then the Colonel closed the door, and held out a telegram.

Winyard took the pink paper, and read aloud :

‘ Would suggest Mistley engaging a valet whom I can recommend. Marie Bakovitch is in England. ’

The message bore only the initials ‘ M. L., ’ and had been despatched from the Westminster Branch Post Office. Winyard read it over once for his own edification, and turned towards his chief with a smile. The Colonel was standing with his broad shoulders against the mantelpiece, his eyes fixed on the carpet. His hands were thrust deeply into his jacket-pockets, and he moved restlessly from one foot to the other.

‘ As usual, ’ said Mistley, still smiling, as he took a seat on the edge of the table, and carefully tore the telegram into small pieces. ‘ As usual with news from headquarters—this comes just too late. ’

‘ How ? ’ asked the Colonel, looking up rapidly.

‘ I had the pleasure of meeting Miss Marie Bakovitch this morning.’

‘ You—here ?’

‘ Yes. She had a cock-shot at me with a very nice little revolver at a distance of about five yards, and missed me !’

‘ Whew—w—w !’ remarked the Colonel. Words usually failed him at a critical juncture. Mistley laughed as he dropped the remains of the telegram into the waste-paper basket—his usual laugh, which had little hilarity in it, serving, nevertheless, very well as a stop-gap.

‘ She was in the train by which we came. I remember seeing her at King’s Cross. No doubt she is staying at Walso. Privately, I think she is a little vague in the upper regions; she did not appear to know exactly what she was about, and—and it was—desperately poor shooting !’

The Colonel tugged pensively at his gray moustache, while his kindly eyes rested with

an expression of wonder on his companion's face.

‘Now that I come to think of it,’ he said slowly, ‘when I drove your mother and Mrs. Wright into Walso the other day I saw a foreign-looking girl accompanied by a tall fair fellow, who looked like a Scandinavian. The ladies were in a shop, and I was waiting outside.’

‘The foreign-looking girl was Marie Bakovitch,’ said Winyard, partly to himself. He was slowly stroking Adonis with a soft pressure of his slim brown hand on the shaggy head. ‘If,’ he continued, after a long pause—‘if it had only been a man, the whole affair would have been intensely funny ; but somehow, since I have seen the girl, the humour of the thing has vanished.’

Lena and Charlie, passing the open window at that moment, heard Winyard's remark. There was no mistaking the neat enunciation, no misconception of the meaning ; and as

they passed on, each wondered a little over those words caught on the wing.

Presently the Colonel walked to the window, still pondering over the event just related to him. Then, without looking round, he asked :

‘ Will you have this valet ?’

‘ No, thank you ! I do not believe in that system, for one reason ; and I require no one to protect me from a girl, for another !’

Then the Colonel turned sharply round, and faced his companion.

‘ Who was the man I saw with her ?’

‘ I was just wondering,’ replied Winyard adroitly.

After a short pause the Colonel spoke again.

‘ I think, Win, you are a little too rash—too indifferent to life ; either the indifference is counterfeit, or there is something radically wrong.’

‘ Let us say,’ replied Winyard impertur-

bably, smiling, ‘that it is counterfeit—at all events, there is nothing radically wrong. But that has not much to do with the question. If this girl is going to be a nuisance she must be made to go; and, above all, the ladies must not get wind of the affair. There is no reason why they should, I think.’

‘Suppose I go and see the girl—she must be made to leave at once!’

‘I think,’ replied Winyard, ‘it would be as well to give her one or two days’ grace—say till Tuesday. There is not the slightest fear of her making herself obnoxious in the meantime; and if she is not away by then, we can put on the screw. Somehow I think she will not be heard of again; her patriotism has been satisfied by the mere smell of powder, like a French journalist’s honour. She was desperately frightened, I think, and very much relieved when she found she had made a bad shot.’

‘Well, then,’ said the Colonel, with some

determination, 'you do not go out of my sight till Tuesday !'

Mistley laughed—a boyish laugh, all glittering with lightness of heart—and made a movement towards the door, for he heard a sweet clear voice trilling a very well-known air about the house. But Colonel Wright did not respond to the movement. He stood at the window, still tugging at his gray moustache—still contemplating the carpet.

'I often wonder,' he said at length, with a quick upward glance towards his young companion—'I often wonder why this girl ignores me, and directs all her mad hatred against you. If the matter is, as she and her precious companions state, merely a political question, it appears to me that my name, and not yours, should be on their list of persons considered dangerous and likely to be harmful to Russia.'

Winyard Mistley made no reply. He stooped to caress Adonis, who was sleeping

on a low chair, and the expression of his face was a masterpiece of innocence and utter emptiness.

‘I think,’ continued the Colonel, who felt he was gaining ground, and therefore grew bolder, while his kindly eyes acquired a new keenness—‘I think . . . I will go and see . . . Marie Bakovitch.’

‘No!’ exclaimed Winyard incautiously ; ‘you must not do that !’

Then there followed rather an awkward silence between these two men who knew each other so well. The younger busied himself with Adonis, while the Colonel looked on with a strange misty look about the eyes.

‘You must think me a great duffer, my boy !’ he said at length, a little grimly.

Winyard shook his head, but did not look up.

‘I am afraid,’ continued the old soldier, ‘that I must be one, or I should have sus-

pected it before. Now—when it might have been . . . too late, I see it all. That first letter from the Society of Patriots . . .

‘Lunatics,’ suggested Winyard, with rather a lame little laugh.

‘No, let us call them Patriots, for some of them, at least, are sincere. Their first letter threatened us both. You answered it, and, contrary to your custom, you forgot to keep a copy of what you wrote. Since then there has been no question of me, but only of you. Oh, what a fool I was not to have thought of it before!’

As usual, Winyard laughed, but the Colonel held to his point.

‘Win, my boy,’ said the old fellow slowly, ‘during the last two years we have been very good friends and that, under exceptionally trying circumstances. We have gone through a good deal together, and we have shared everything; I think it would have been right and fair . . . in fact, you

must see for yourself that I have a claim to share this additional danger with you as we shared the others.'

Winyard was very much occupied with the buckle of Adonis's collar, and did not look up at once: Then he looked towards the door, and said :

' Listen !'

Adonis, who knew the meaning of the word, instantly cocked his left ear and obeyed. Slowly he wagged his tail with little awkward jerks from side to side, and looked round into his master's face as if to say : '*I know who that is !*'

Without, in the low-roofed hall, Charles Mistley was relating some incident to Lena and her mother. It was evidently amusing, because occasionally the somewhat monotonous rhythm of his deep voice (the softest in a drawing-room, and loudest in a gale) was broken by a laugh ; clear and merry from Lena, or soft and true from Mrs. Wright.

At last the tale came to an end, and the two voices were mingled in one happy burst of merriment.

‘No, Colonel!’ said Winyard, shaking his head very wisely. ‘I think you had no right whatever!’

And, with a low laugh, he passed out into the hall to join the laughers there.





CHAPTER XV.

THE little parish church of Broom was remarkably full on the Sunday morning following these events. This fact was observed by the young vicar without surprise, and moreover without prejudice.

The Reverend Charles Renforth was a Christian who managed fairly well to hide the muscularity of his ideas ; but in the recesses of his charitable heart there lay a mighty worship for all strong things. Under such heading he classed Charles Mistley, having contracted a great friendship with the young sailor during the short intervals

of holiday spent by the latter at Broomhaugh. Of Winyard he had not seen so much, but of his actual deeds knew more. Colonel Wright was a public man, and the young parson read the newspapers assiduously in his quiet little study, watching events at home and abroad, and learning of the deeds of Englishmen who serve their country by wandering away from it. 'It was never our Government that made us a great nation. England was made by adventurers, not by its Government; and I believe it will only hold its place by adventurers.' These true words, written by the greatest adventurer of the nineteenth century, apply to such men as Colonel Wright and Winyard Mistley, of whom there are many in our very midst, unappreciated, unadmired, and cast into the shade by a low type of hero-worship, which takes for its idols wordy politicians, mere ranters, wind-bags, and self-seeking humbugs, unworthy of the name of

patriots. Such men, however, failed to impress the athletic young parson of Broom. His heart warmed towards a stronger type, and the hardy old Colonel was his ideal Englishman.

The Reverend Charles Renforth was therefore by no means surprised when his little church filled with unwonted faces and unknown bonnets from Walso, and even beyond that ancient burgh. Nor did he take unto himself any undue credit by attributing this enlarged attendance to a laudable desire to hear him discourse upon the Scriptures.

He shrewdly suspected that these strangers had come, not to worship by preference in his church, but to see the well-known Colonel Wright and his distinguished young coadjutor; yet he thought no worse of them for that, and was honestly glad to see them all, remembering that a seed sown by the wind may well find a fruitful resting-place.

During the progress of the second lesson, wherein there were many short pauses, the vicar discovered a face among the congregation which, by reason of its unfamiliarity, called for further glances. It was that of a young man—a pale, intellectual face with a square jaw and closed lips, softened by a pair of wondrous blue eyes, wherein lay the shadow of anxiety or hopeless sorrow. The gentle despair of those eyes disturbed the reader, and awakened within his honest breast that sympathetic yearning which the coldest of us cannot but feel in the presence of one whom we know, or imagine, to be bearing the weight of a genuine sorrow.

Ivan Meyer had not come to church from mere curiosity, but with a set purpose. Marie Bakovitch had been more incomprehensible than ever during the last few days, and her patient lover was slowly awakening to the fact that her mind was no longer

reliable. Nevertheless he hoped on ; but to continue hoping and watching in silence and alone was a heavy task for one of his impulsive nature. He suddenly determined therefore to seek assistance, and this from Winyard Mistley himself. Something in his artistic soul, some strange love of a crude contrast, prompted him to do this ; and so convinced was he of the wisdom of his appeal, that he had come to Broom Church with a little note in his pocket to be passed into Winyard's hand.

By chance the Colonel and his secretary were sitting next to each other, forming, as they invariably did, a striking contrast. The old soldier sat motionless, with his powerful gray head reclining against the panel of the black oak pew—a calm and thoughtful face, with eyes a little inclined to be dreamy at times, and vacant in their gaze ; while Winyard, with his quick glance and erect head, was the very incarnation of energy and

resource. Here was no dreaming, no absence of mind, but a cheerful readiness to face every emergency, and a merry suggestion for every difficulty.

As the preacher preached, and looked over the heads of his listeners, his eyes frequently rested on the two men ; and every time they did so, he felt humbled. He could not help comparing and weighing in the balance of his mind the relative merits of words and deeds. His words, and the deeds of these two men. His own work, he was convinced, was the noblest that is placed in the hands of man ; but at times it appeared to him essentially a work of words, and a young man at some period or other of his existence is sure to conceive a sudden hatred for the vanity of words. The necessity for action comes to us all at some moments, and this usually happens between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five—after the growing and before the vegetat-

ing period ; when the human plant has attained its full height, but has yet to form its own wood from a green and pliant stalk, which, if slightly bent, will grow in crookedness, hardening as its growth gains force.

As the congregation trooped down the narrow aisle, Winyard caught sight, for the third time in his life, of Ivan Meyer ; and in his eyes he saw the gleam of recognition which is so difficult to conceal, and with it he thought he detected a peculiar pleading expression which he failed, at the time, to understand. Without turning round to look, he felt that the tall foreigner was immediately behind him as he passed out of the low door, and it was characteristic of his readiness of mind that he showed no surprise when a note was thrust rather clumsily into his hand. He must have slipped it into his pocket with wonderful celerity, because he was shaking hands the next

instant with Miss Mabel Sandford, who appeared to be completely satisfied with the effect of her new summer costume.

Her interest in the theatricals was rather too ostentatious ; and Mrs. Wright, with a woman's quick insight, saw, as she came out of the porch, that she was displaying her intimacy with the young diplomate for the sole benefit of her lady friends.

Mrs. Mistley had for some days been trying to secure a *tête-à-tête* with her son, and with little difficulty she now succeeded in arranging that they left the churchyard together. For some moments the mother and son walked side by side in silence, then Winyard glanced over his shoulder, and said :

‘The Colonel has been caught by Old Sandford, which means that he will not get away for at least a quarter of an hour.’

Mrs. Mistley smiled vaguely, but made no reply for some moments.

‘He told me yesterday,’ she said at length, ‘that if any further mission were offered to him, he would refuse. He says the work is too hard for a man of his age!’

‘Yes . . . I know. He has often said the same to me. . . . Perhaps it is better that he *should* give it up, though of course that is a mere excuse. He is as strong as ever, and as capable, but he has had a long life of wandering, and it has been weary work for Mrs. Wright . . . and Lena. He feels *that*, I know—he feels that Mrs. Wright’s life has not been an easy one, though she is so brave and cheery. She seems to have no relations, no sisters I mean, or brothers—or even old friends.’

‘Only Laurance Lowe!’ said Mrs. Mistley, in a low voice full of gentle sympathy.

‘I do not understand Laurance Lowe,’ said Winyard thoughtfully.

‘No . . . I think . . . very few people do!’

They were now walking by the Broom-water, and the ripple of the stream as it danced and tumbled along filled in the intervals of the conversation, and led to long, thoughtful pauses.

‘Tell me, Win,’ said Mrs. Mistley at length, with a hesitating glance towards him. ‘What do you think of doing in the future?’

‘I?’ he began vaguely. ‘Oh, I told them at headquarters that I was ready to go anywhere at any moment!’

‘You have no thought of settling down yet?’ gently and suggestively.

‘Settling down?’

‘Yes; marrying and going into Parliament, and behaving generally as a well-off and somewhat ambitious young Englishman ought to do, according to precedent!’

‘I have no respect for precedent, mother!’

‘Nor I. But why not give up wandering, Win, and go into Parliament?’ she asked

softly. ‘A man who has mastered a speciality, as you have this Russian question, is certain to get on there.’

‘But I have not mastered it yet.’

‘Well—you and the Colonel are the acknowledged authorities upon the matter. I do not see what more you can require. Whether you have mastered it or not, you know more than any other man.’

‘Yes, but it is like exploring a new country—there is no end to it. One must keep up to the times and be ever in the front, or it is useless competing. Once the ground has been travelled over by another man, the interest is lost. While I am here, the Russians are not by any means idle ; and if I started for Central Asia to-morrow, I should find that things had moved onwards since I was there before—onwards for them, backwards for us !’

‘Then you have not altered your plans. You intend to continue being a wanderer on

the face of the earth, a man whom the Cabinet keep in sight, as being reckless enough and clever enough to send on any wild-goose chase they may have in hand ?

‘ Do they keep me in sight on that account, mother ?’

‘ I was told so by a Minister.’

‘ I am glad to hear it. A man may get very good sport after wild-geese, and who knows what may come of his knowledge of the country at some future day ! I tell you, mother, this is an age of specialities—universality is at an end. My speciality is this Central Asian question. At any time, at any moment, we may find ourselves upon the brink of the biggest fight the modern world has seen ; then my time will come. Then the first words of the War Office will be : “ Send for Colonel Wright and Winyard Mistley ”—the one to plan, the other to execute. When that time comes, mother . . . *nous verrons !*’

‘In the meantime, it seems to me that your entire life is being sacrificed to be in readiness for an event which may never occur.’

‘Ah! Of course it may not come in my time, but that is a chance I must be content to run.’

‘There is a view of the question which you appear to have overlooked, Win,’ said Mrs. Mistley, with quiet firmness.

‘Yes?’

‘Suppose you wished to marry!’ As the little lady uttered these words she suddenly raised her head, and looked keenly into her son’s face.

Beneath his moustache, Winyard slowly drew in his lips as if to moisten them, though the air was cool enough.

‘As the tree stands, so must it fall!’ he said with a sudden laugh.

‘Which being translated means?’

‘That no man who feels the restless spirit

of the wanderer within him has a right to ask a girl to marry him.'

He looked down at her, and smiled calmly.

'But the girl may be stronger than the spirit.'

'Temporarily?'

'No, permanently.'

'I doubt it,' said Winyard. 'Look at a case we have before us now. Colonel Wright has never settled down.'

'Perhaps, Win, his wife has never asked him to. Perhaps she has thought of his career in life before her own happiness. Women have been known to do that before now.'

The practical young man looked doubtful.

'And do you consider that her life has been a success?' he asked.

'Most certainly I do. And you men may be thankful that women have the power of loving for love's sake; that absence makes but little difference with them. Especially

you, of the great army of wandering Englishmen, who turn up in all parts of the world with your brown faces and ready hands. You are all the same ; the only soft part of your hearts is reserved for the love of Nature ; and unfortunately women love wanderers, and soldiers and sailors, more than other men.'

'Mother,' said Winyard, with a cheery laugh, 'you are getting sentimental, and that will never do. If you infect me, I shall die off in a week. And as for talking in that insinuating manner about settling down, how about a certain elderly lady who is always flying about the world—Scotland, London, Paris, Rome, and even St. Petersburg—nursing the stricken, and consoling such as are love-sick or martyrs to indigestion ?'

'When you marry I will settle down in a cottage near at hand, take to needlework, and worry your wife. There is Lena coming

alone ; run away and meet her while I go in and take off my bonnet.'

They were now upon the stone terrace, and Mrs. Mistley pointed down the valley as she walked towards the house.

'I expect,' said Winyard partly to himself, 'that Charlie has been caught by the Sandfords.'

At the head of the narrow steps which he had just ascended, he drew the note handed to him in church from his pocket. It was in French, one line in a fine clear handwriting :

'Meet a friend to-night at the bottom of the small steps.—I. M.'

'I. M. !' mused Winyard—'Ivan Meyer ; and he calls himself a friend. I am gradually getting into a fog with all these muddling conspirators.'

Then he thrust the note back into his pocket, and ran lightly down the steps to meet Lena.

‘ You are polite !’ was her greeting.

‘ I am,’ he replied, bowing low. ‘ I am nothing if not polite.’

‘ Then you are nothing,’ she answered saucily.

‘ Thank you. I was afraid you did not think much of me.’

‘ You have allowed me,’ she continued severely, ‘ to walk home from church alone, and to carry *this* unassisted.’

She held out for his inspection a tiny Prayer-book, of which the weight might safely be set down as three ounces.

‘ Good gracious!’ exclaimed Winyard, ‘ you do not mean to say that you carried that all the way !’ And he gravely took the burden from her hands.

‘ I thought Charlie was with you,’ he continued apologetically.

‘ No, Mr. Mistley, I was alone.’

‘ It shall not occur again, Miss Wright.’

‘ It is not polite to mimic people, Mr.

Mistley,' said Lena, looking straight in front of her. They were at the foot of the stone stairs cut in the wall, which were just broad enough for two persons to pass. Then her humour suddenly changed.

'How very foolish we are!' she exclaimed, laughing. Just as she spoke, she slipped backwards, and her laugh turned into a little cry of fright.

Winyard, who was a step behind her, appeared almost to have foreseen the mishap, for his arm was round her before it was possible to know whether she would have fallen or not. It was doubtless owing to the narrowness of the steps that he found it necessary to throw his arm right round her, instead of contenting himself by supporting her with his hand.

'Perhaps we are,' he observed gravely, as she recovered herself quickly and passed on.

'Perhaps we are what?' she asked, keeping her face studiously turned from him, and

plucking little tufts of lichen from the wall as she passed.

‘Foolish!’

‘I am, at any rate,’ said Lena, with a little laugh. ‘I never do remember that silly step. The way it tilts forward when one stands on it is most alarming. Now I am sure you had forgotten it.’

‘Excuse me, I remembered it.’

‘And you did not warn me. Perhaps you wished me to tumble down to the bottom, and come to an untimely end in the depths of the Broomwater.’

Winyard did not answer at once; he appeared to be pondering over the words before he spoke them.

‘Perhaps,’ he said in a voice so low that Lena could scarcely hear it—‘perhaps I wished to have the pleasure of saving you from all that.’

Then the ingenuous youth changed the conversation skilfully, knowing that maidens

are delicate in their susceptibilities, and love little a joke that is pressed too far. That loose step, with its alarming weakness, was never again overlooked by Lena; and by some strange sinuosity of her maiden mind, abetted by her imaginative heart (an unfathomable shallow, all criss-cross currents), she came to loving it beyond its forty-seven mossy fellows.

Even gray, dead stones can be endowed with individuality by the associations of a past that never comes again. The power and memory of them lie round us as we pass on through life, like landmarks left behind the westward-travelling wanderer, who, facing the glorious uncertainty of sunset gold, turns back and looks on that which he will never see with quite the self-same eyes again. We think that our ancestral halls are dear to us by the power of their own individuality, but it is not really so. It is the magic touch of human sympathy, human love, and human

interdependence that awakens the quick thrill of memory. All earthly things—and more particularly all human things—live by past association in the human heart. To this there is but one exception—the sea, which, like a wayward mistress, demands a life's devotion, to be repaid by fickleness and cruelty. She scorns all outward aid of human origin ; but with simple blend of cloud, sunshine, and blue water, offers a variety of aspect unequalled by wood and mountain.





CHAPTER XVI.

THE moon had bravely taken up her nightly task of sweeping clear the heavens. But there were some huge clouds that promised to strain her cleansing powers to the utmost. The good folks walking home from church had clasped tight their woollen wraps as they spoke of coming rain ; but that was three good hours earlier in the night, before the moon had risen and set to work with all the ardour of a new broom. Here and there in the clouded vault little puffs of silvery white betrayed weak spots in the canopy of vapour ; and through these the white scavenger was boring as-

siduously, leaving no breach unattempted. In some places she had even broken through, and the stars twinkled faintly down towards the labouring earth.

The cool night wind came smoothly over the bare hills, moaning through the stately fir-trees, while the smaller and more demonstrative undergrowth of beech and thorn rustled with the crispness of approaching autumn already in their leaves.

Far up, on the hillside, some fond ewe, whose maternal heart was not reconciled to the inevitable, bleated dismally ; and after waiting vainly for an answering cry, bleated again, and wandered on over the brow of the hill. The inevitable in her case was the progress of little woolly legs from awkwardness to sprightly gambollings, and thence by natural sequence to the dread companionship of mint sauce.

Winyard Mistley sat on the stone sill of his bedroom window, ten feet from the ground,

with his legs dangling in the darkness, and listened absently to the distant lamentation. It may be that he was picturing to himself the lonely mother's clumsy anxiety as she stumbled on, totally disregarding the inequalities in her own path, and gave forth that unheeded wail to the grim hills and laughing stars.

The ears of a man who has seen the darker side of human nature become very keen, with that blessed adaptability which characterizes all our senses ; and Winyard was waiting for the sound of a footfall or the crackle of a branch on the little path far down below the wall, knowing that in the stillness of night he could not fail to hear it.

The monotonous cry of the sheep was not the only sound of woe in the air, for in the darkened room behind the solitary watcher the silence was every now and then broken by a little muffled whine. Adonis was allowed to sleep in his master's room, and he was now

lamenting gently and continuously that it had been considered expedient to attach him to the bed-post on this occasion. Apart from the indignity of being held prisoner by such an extremely domestic device, he felt deeply that he had not been trusted to obey orders. But Winyard knew the dog's simple character too well. He knew well enough that while the command was still fresh in his mind, Adonis could be implicitly trusted to obey ; but the most ardent watcher is open to a sudden attack of sleepiness, and the shortest nap inevitably drives an unsympathetic order from the canine memory. This result Winyard wished to avoid, as Adonis would undoubtedly have undertaken a vigorous search for his master despite such a trifling obstacle as a ten-foot drop to the ground.

The scene was so lovely, the thousand night-odours so sweet, that the time slipped rapidly away, while the watcher almost forgot to note its passage. He had been sitting

there nearly half an hour, when at length he heard the rustle as if of some one moving through the underwood upon the slope down towards the stream. With a last whisper of admonition to Adonis, he placed his two hands on the window-sill and threw himself far out into the darkness. He lighted softly on the mossy turf, and crossed the lawn.

His eyes were now accustomed to the darkness, and he could recognise the form of each stately tree, drawn in sharp black filigree against the gray sky. In the shadow of the wall at the foot of the long flight of steps, he soon discovered a tall figure leaning against a tree, with the leisurely patience of one who knows that his waiting is not vain.

For a moment it struck Winyard that if this man had evil intentions, nothing would be easier than to shoot him as he descended the steps with the moonlight shining full upon his face; but the thought was only

fleeting, and untinged with any likelihood of turning to a fear.

As the young Englishman approached, Ivan Meyer stepped forward, and, with an artist's ever-present love of harmless effect, raised his hat as he said :

‘ Monsieur Mistley ?’

Winyard was one of those unfortunate people whose sense of humour is irrepressible—unfortunate, because it invariably strikes at the wrong moment, and because the possession of it makes one see deeper pathos in everyday life than those whose smile is slower. The incongruity of the whole affair suddenly forced itself into Winyard's thoughts, and he was thankful that his face was in the shade as he raised his hat slowly and coldly, with a truer knowledge of dramatic effect than Ivan Meyer possessed.

‘ I am *Winyard* Mistley,’ he explained. ‘ It is, perhaps, my elder brother with whom monsieur wishes to converse.’

It may have been that Meyer thought he detected a slight shade of irony in the formality of this reply, for he instantly dropped the ceremonious mode of address in the third person.

‘No, monsieur, it is yourself whom I seek,’ he said, with a nervous hesitation which did not fail to raise him considerably in his companion’s estimation. ‘You will pardon my indiscretion, but I was hard pressed before I sought assistance—you can believe that?’

With characteristic foresight the young Englishman began to wonder how much money he had about his person, as he bowed in acquiescence.

Instantly Ivan Meyer saw that his words had been misconstrued, and hastened to explain.

‘I am here,’ he said, in a tone showing more self-assertion, ‘to ask a strange favour!’

‘I will endeavour to assist you—Monsieur . . . ?’

‘Meyer—Ivan Meyer. I am a Russian by nationality ; a Swede by rights, for I am a native of the Baltic Provinces.’

Again Winyard bowed, and waited with the same unsympathetic silence for further information.

‘You know the name of Marie Bakovitch, monsieur ?’

‘I do.’

‘She is at present in Walso, near to here.’

‘Do you come to me on the part of mademoiselle ?’ asked the Englishman somewhat coldly.

‘No ; I come on my own account.’

‘Indeed !’ Winyard moved restlessly from one foot to the other, and by casting glances up at the clouds, down towards his own boots, and indiscriminately around, indicated gently that he was not desirous of prolonging an interview with this mysterious youth.

Suddenly Ivan Meyer took courage, and

stepping closer to his companion, he said passionately :

‘ I come to you because you have ruined my life. I am the lover of Marie Bakovitch. Her love for me, or the prospect of winning it, was the one bright spot in my existence, which has been as dark as that of every young Russian. For her I worked night and day, in the hopes of one day becoming a great artist ; for her sake I would willingly have thrown my life away. But for her sweet influence I would have become a Terrorist, fighting a glorious battle by means so foul that God can only frown upon the righteous side and uphold the tyrant. For her sake I forgave my father’s exile, my mother’s death, my own miserable childhood ; and, just at the moment when happiness seemed within my reach—when I felt sure of winning Marie’s love, you rose upon the bright horizon of my joy—and now . . . now you are driving her mad. I should have

hated you ; at one time I thought I did, but now I know that it is not you but your power that I hate. I have known of Marie's project for a year, and have ever since striven to make her give it up. It is not for your sake that I have done this, but for hers—nevertheless, I have some claim upon you. Surely I am justified in calling upon you now, in the name of the Blessed Virgin, to obey me—to come, now, with me to Marie Bakovitch !

‘ But,’ said Winyard with true British calmness, which appeared almost cruel in its striking contrast to Meyer's excitement—‘ but what good can I do ?’

‘ I do not know—we are in the hands of Providence ; but she is for ever asking for you !’ replied the Russian defiantly.

‘ For *me* ?’

‘ Yes ; in her moments of calmness the name of Mistley is ever on her lips, and when she becomes excited she attempts to

come out to seek you. I have locked her in our little sitting-room, promising to come and find you. Sometimes I think she is mad, monsieur, and at other moments I think I am so myself. Will you come? I have provided for everything. Marie is calmer to-night, but she never sleeps now. Mrs. Armstrong, our landlady, has her room in an outbuilding—all Walso is asleep; it is safe!

Still Winyard hesitated; Ivan Meyer evidently did not know of the meeting by the stream, he reflected; and the sight of the man she had attempted to murder might have a terrible effect upon the girl.

‘Is it . . . possible . . . that you think this a trap?’ asked Meyer slowly.

That decided the young Englishman.

‘I will go with you,’ he said simply. ‘The thought you suggest never entered my head.’

‘Thank you, monsieur. The way is not

long if we go by the fields. The path is too narrow for us to walk together—shall I lead the way ?’

‘ I think I know this path better than you ; I will go first.’

‘ I thought . . .’ began Meyer, and then suddenly checked himself.

Winyard turned, and in the moonlight the two young men looked into each other’s eyes for a moment in silence. The Englishman was smiling, but his companion was grave.

‘ You thought ?’ said the former interrogatively.

‘ I thought that you might consider yourself at an undesirable disadvantage.’

With a shrug of the shoulders and a short laugh, Winyard turned again and led the way. At the first they were silent, but later, when they were able to walk side by side, they talked—or, to be more correct, Meyer talked while his companion listened.

Thus they made their way across the dewy fields together—the artist and the diplomat, one whose feelings are his greatest aid and virtue, while to the other such commodities must necessarily be a drag and hindrance. The impetuous foreigner, transparent as the day in his unreserved sorrow, and the cool Englishman with his ready smile, as impenetrable as the ripple on the surface of a mountain lake, which hides the depth and dissembles unsuspected recesses beneath the glance of superficial merriment.

The young Russian made no pretence of talking on general topics. Marie Bakovitch was the one interest of his life, and of her he spoke with that *naïve* enthusiasm which is less apt to make us smile when it is expressed in French. To Winyard, however, these raptures had a peculiar interest, and he was far from laughing at them. Gradually he learnt the true character of the girl who had devoted a year of her life to the

quest of his, and the more he learnt the more he wondered. It is difficult for a strong man, whose control over his mind and heart is almost as great as that exercised over the more mechanical portions of his body, to understand the character of a girl, passionate yet weak, firm and yet *fébrile*, like Marie. Still more difficult is it for him to sympathize with such a character. In his eyes the passion has no grandeur, it is mere weakness ; the firmness is nought else than unreasoning obstinacy. As Meyer talked on, Winyard was half ashamed to find that he could only despise Marie and pity her lover. It is not a pleasant sensation for a young man to feel that he despises a girl, especially if she be young and beautiful, as this strange maiden undoubtedly was. The thought jars against his sense of chivalry, and seems almost a sacrilege ; it upsets, once and for all, one of youth's most precious illusions.

With a man's impartiality (for no woman ever yet placed both sides of a question on an even footing—thank goodness!) Winyard combined the happy possession of an intuition delicate and sensitive as that of a woman. It is by aid of this mental sensitiveness that women gain in a short conversation, or even a momentary glance, an impression which was never conveyed by words, or passed from eyes to eyes. It comes—and there, long after the remembrance of the accompanying incidents has passed away, it is found like the precious deposit at the bottom of a gold-digger's pan.

Upon Winyard's mind this midnight conversation—the only one he ever had with Ivan Meyer—left a distinct impression, without, however, any reasoning to bear it up. No doubt the more delicate machinery of a woman's mind would have turned out neater handiwork; but such as it was, the impression

was there : and ever afterwards he knew and *felt* that Marie had never loved Ivan Meyer, and that therein lay the explanation of her strange conduct.





CHAPTER XVII.

THE streets of Walso were deserted when the two men entered the little town. The moon, now rapidly clearing the heavens of a few fleecy clouds that still remained, shone placidly down upon the gray-stone houses with their red-tile roofs. No window was lighted up, and the clean white blinds gave back the soft moonlight, and seemed to speak of healthy, quiet slumber, the reward of a hard day's toil.

Meyer opened noiselessly the door of Mrs. Armstrong's cottage.

'I covered the windows,' he said in a

whisper, 'from inside, so that one cannot see the light of the lamp.'

Winyard followed his guide into the dark passage, closing the door behind him. A moment later his companion pushed open that of the tiny parlour, and a stream of light poured out on to the plain wall and oil-cloth-covered floor.

'Come, monsieur,' he said, after glancing into the lighted room; and as Winyard obeyed he mechanically and critically noted the hideous pattern of the oil-cloth upon the floor.

Marie was seated near the table, with both arms resting upon its dull red cover. The soft lamp-light gleamed upon her flaxen hair, and defined her white profile against the dark wall beyond. She turned her eyes wearily towards the door as the two men entered, but there was no light of recognition in her face. It was at that moment that Winyard was struck for the first time by the

wonder of her great beauty. He had never before seen her without her hat, and in the soft light her lovely supple hair had a gleam of gold upon it, borrowed from the lamp's rays. Her light blue eyes looked darker by the same reason, and from the red tablecloth there arose a pink glow which cast over her pallid face a rosy hue of life. But it was a soulless life, and the young Englishman winced as he met those vacant, pleading eyes.

Meyer motioned him to stand aside in a corner near the 'ikon,' where the tiny oil-lamp flickered little ruby shafts of light across the holy picture. Then he approached her and said :

‘ Marie, I have brought him.’

The girl took not the slightest notice ; indeed she did not appear to hear his voice, but sat gazing dreamily at her own hands lying idly on the table before her. And now the patient lover went to her side, and laid his hand upon her lifeless wrist.

‘ Marie !’ he whispered, speaking Russian for the first time in Mistley’s presence. ‘ My little Marie ! I am Ivan—do you not know me ?’

She slowly raised her eyes from the contemplation of her own hands, and fixed them searchingly on his face.

‘ Ivan !’ she said at length, in a sweet deep voice. ‘ You have come already ! Are they waiting to take me away ?’

‘ Who, my Marie ?’

‘ The soldiers, for I have killed him—I have killed him !’ Her voice died away to a whisper.

‘ No, you have not killed him, Marie. He is here !’ said Meyer, speaking slowly, as one speaks to a child.

‘ Who is here ?’

‘ Winyard Mistley—he has come at your own request !’

‘ No, Ivan ; no ! I shot him at the stream. I killed him. I will never see him

again, for he is dead. I told him to stop, but he came nearer ; he never took his eyes off mine—he never hesitated ; and as he came—as he looked at me—I thought it was the *other*. He looked so brave and calm, but . . . but the *other* is bigger . . . bigger and braver !’

When Winyard was excited, or at moments when his nerves were on tension, awaiting the time for action, he had a peculiar habit of drawing in his lips, first the lower and then the upper, as if they were parched and needed moisture. This action made his square jaw look squarer, and by sympathy his gray eyes grew dogged and dark beneath the motionless lashes.

All this time he had been standing in the darker corner of the little room, with keen observant eyes upon the lovers. One brown hand was religiously executing Mr. Czerny’s No. I. five-finger exercise on the top of an old three-cornered oak cupboard ; and his

lips were slowly moistening each other. Perfectly calm and collected, watchful, alert, and keen, he waited his time. At last he stepped forward, and with a little sign to Meyer to let him speak, he said :

‘ No, Mademoiselle Bakovitch ; you are entirely mistaken. You did not shoot me.’

The girl looked up at him with eyes vague at first and wondering ; but gradually the rays of a reasoning soul shone through them, and with a motion of her hand towards the soft hair over her temple, she spoke :

‘ You—here,’ she said ; ‘ *you !* Why have you come ? Where is the other ? He does not come. I want him ; not you.’

She rose from her seat, and wandered vaguely up and down, glancing at the two men from time to time furtively, with troubled, distrustful eyes. It seemed as if reason had completely forsaken her brain, for she murmured incoherently in a strange medley of languages. After a few moments

she suddenly recovered her senses, and appeared to recognise the two men again. It was a terrible sight, and even Winyard Mistley looked pale and bewildered, while his companion watched Marie with the dull calmness of despair.

With a gesture, which was almost a command, he bade her resume her seat, and then in a masterful tone he spoke :

‘*Mademoiselle*,’ he said, ‘I must ask you to leave England at once. You will return home, and immediately send in your resignation to the Society of Patriots on account of your approaching marriage with *Monsieur Meyer*, which will disqualify you as a member. Have I your promise that you will leave here—if not to-morrow—as soon as possible? I ask this of you, though it is in my power to command. And now I beg of you, for the sake of *Ivan Meyer*, for the sake of all you love on earth, to give up for ever your connection with any political

society. Politics are not for women ; it is a man's work—leave it to men. Every woman who has meddled with them has brought misery to herself and sorrow to those who loved her.'

The girl slowly raised her eyes to his, and watched his earnest face as he spoke. There must have been something strange in her gaze, for the young fellow winced beneath it. It had never been his lot to look on genuine, hopeless misery before ; but he instinctively recognised what he saw in those sad blue eyes.

'I will go,' said Marie softly.

Then Winyard mechanically moved towards the door. With a silent inclination of the head, he left them. Meyer alone returned the salutation, but did not stir from his position near to Marie Bakovitch.

With deliberate care and noiselessness, the young Englishman passed out into the passage, and raised the latch of the outer door.

The little street lay silently in the white moonlight, which touched the old houses and moss-grown tiles with a fairy-like glint. As he paused on the threshold, he heard a quick footstep behind him, and Ivan Meyer stood at his side.

‘You see,’ he whispered, ‘she is going mad!’

In all and through all, Winyard Mistley was eminently practical.

‘Are you quite alone?’ he asked. ‘Have you no friends in England? Has she no maid, even, with her?’

‘Yes; she has a maid who is now sleeping in her room. She is young, but intelligent.’

‘You must rouse her. Let her persuade mademoiselle to go to bed, and she must remain by her side to-night. In the morning, if mademoiselle is better, you must get her away from here at once. If . . . if she is worse, send to me, and my mother will come to her . . . a woman will know best

what is to be done. I cannot understand . . . *anything* ; but I am convinced that mademoiselle is not going mad : it is only temporary. I think it must be what is called hysteria. Have you *no* friends in England ?

‘ We have but one—a Monsieur Jacobi, of London.’

‘ Monsieur Jacobi, of London . . . who is he ?’ asked Winyard.

‘ I know him very slightly ; but he has been kind to Marie. He is a musician, and . . . and is connected with some society to which Marie belongs.’

Winyard shook his head.

‘ He is no good then,’ he said. ‘ You must go to your Consul, that is all. If I do not hear from you by eleven to-morrow morning, I will know that you have left Walso ; but if you require assistance of any description, write to me or telegraph at once. Put my name in full—Winyard—

W-i-n-y-a-r-d—in the address, so that no mistake can arise. Do not thank me, for I have done nothing yet. Good-night.'

And so they parted. With everything to make them bitter enemies, they had yet been friends. Their acquaintance had been of but a few hours' duration, for they never met again. To one it was a mere incident in a busy life, a few hours taken from the many ; an unavoidable divergence from the clearly-defined path of his career, to aid a straggler on the mountain-side. To the other, it was an event of some importance in an existence overshadowed by persistent ill-fortune. It was a ray of light upon the darkness, which only passed away and left the shadow deeper by comparison.

Ivan Meyer re-entered the cottage, and closed the door. Marie was waiting for him in the little parlour. She was sitting by the table, and her attitude was characterized by a peculiar stillness which had no feeling

of repose about it. He stood watching her for some moments with weary, yearning eyes and haggard face.

‘Marie,’ he said at length, in a voice that was no longer pleading as of old, ‘let us understand each other.’

‘Yes, Ivan,’ she replied softly. ‘What do you not understand?’

He came nearer, and, leaning one hand upon the back of her chair, he bent over her.

‘Will you do what the Englishman asks?’

‘Yes,’ she replied in a dull voice.

‘All?’ he asked, with trembling lips.

‘Yes, Ivan—all. We will go to America as you desire. Oh! I am so tired—my head is throbbing! I will go to bed now. Good-night, Ivan!’

She rose and extended her hand to him. In a wondering manner he raised the delicate fingers to his lips—very tenderly, very

lovingly—and held the door open while she passed out.

Then he dropped into a chair, and sat staring stupidly at the paraffine lamp till the distant chime of two o'clock aroused him, and sent him mechanically to his room.

Winyard Mistley walked slowly through the peaceful fields. He had lighted a beloved briar-wood pipe, and in the calm air the transparent puffs of smoke rose with a pensive regularity. He noted the soft mist lying over the lowlands by the river; he followed the bold outline of the distant hills against the glowing heaven, wondering at the lace-like fineness of the trees, each tiny branch of which stood in dark relief—and yet he was not thinking of these darksome glories. The hurried scuttle of an occasional mouse in precipitous retreat disturbed him not, for he knew the night, and loved it with the love of an Oriental.

A few hours before, he had felt only an

unchivalrous contempt for Marie Bakovitch—the contempt of a strong and steadfast mind for a weak and wavering—and now there was nought but pity in his heart. A change brought about by one long glance of her mournful eyes, and he despised himself a little for this same Christian weakness—pity.

‘I know now,’ he said to himself beneath the still night sky—‘I know now why women invariably come to grief over politics. It is because they cannot separate the two lives—the political life and that of a woman. There is something in this beyond me altogether—something that I cannot get at. Another fellow is mixed up in it, that is certain; but who he is, and what he is, and where he comes in, goodness knows! The “other,” she calls him, and somehow it sounds like Charlie, which is of course ridiculous . . . unless . . . by George! . . . unless she has mistaken him for me, and he has

been playing the same trick on me as I have been playing on the Colonel. But all that is practically impossible. There was something about the expression of her face that I cannot understand . . . perhaps some day I will.'

His thoughts then drifted on in other channels, and he increased his pace.

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